

Groton Daily Independent

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Wednesday, Dec. 17

Senior Menu: Baked hot ham and cheese, broccolo potato soup, fruit, poke cake.
School Breakfast: Oatmeal.
School Lunch: Soup, sandwich.
Emmanuel Lutheran: Confirmation, 4 p.m.; League, 6:30 p.m.
St. John's Lutheran: Confirmation, 3:45 p.m.; DFC Supper, 6 p.m.; Advent Service, 7 p.m.
United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.; Groton Ad Council, 7 p.m.
Groton C&MA: Kid's Club, Youth Group, Adult Bible Study, 7 p.m.
6th Grade GBB Practice, 6 p.m.
5th Grade BBB, 6 p.m.
6th Grade Boys Basketball, 7:30 p.m.



Thursday, Dec. 18

Senior Menu: Beef and potatoes, antigua blend, fruit, breadstick.
School Breakfast: Maple baked French toast.
School Lunch: Turkey gravy over mashed potatoes, stuffing, cranberries.
Northeast Conference Wrestling Tournament at Clark, 4 p.m.
1st Grade Boys Basketball Practice, 4:30 p.m.
Middle School Girls Basketball hosts Waubay-Summit: (7th grade @ 6pm, 8th grade @ 7pm)
4th Grade BB, 6 p.m.

Groton Daily Independent
PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445
Paul's Cell/Text: 605-397-7460

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1440

Why 1440? The printing press was invented around the year 1440, spreading knowledge to the masses and changing the course of history. More facts: In every day, there are 1,440 minutes. We're here to make each one count.

Bondi Beach Updates

Australian authorities yesterday said Sunday's mass shooting at a Bondi Beach Hanukkah event, which killed at least 15 people, was a terrorist attack motivated by Islamic State ideology.

Police recovered two homemade Islamic State flags from the car of the suspects, a 50-year-old Indian man and his 24-year-old Australian-born son. The son, Naveed Akram, was hospitalized with critical injuries, while his father, Sajid Akram, was fatally shot at the scene. Authorities had interviewed both men in 2019 regarding the son's potential extremist associations but found no immediate threat. Last month, the pair traveled to the Philippines, where Islamic State militants are known to operate. The father was also a licensed firearm holder, prompting lawmakers to revisit gun control measures.

An online campaign has raised over \$2.3M for Ahmed al-Ahmed, a Syrian-born fruit shop owner who disarmed one gunman before being shot by the other. Meanwhile, Australian blood banks reported nearly 50,000 appointments Monday—nearly double the previous daily record.

Colorado River Conundrum

Negotiations kicked off yesterday in Las Vegas to determine how to divide the Colorado River basin's shrinking water supplies. Any outcome will have implications for more than 40 million residents relying on the river to power cities, farms, and companies—including resource-heavy data centers and semiconductor businesses.

A decades-long drought (the worst in 1,200 years) has pushed Hoover Dam's Lake Mead to historic lows. The federal government aims to cut 2 million to 4 million acre-feet of water usage per year to reduce strain; an acre-foot equals 1 acre covered by 12 inches of water. However, the seven states—Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming—have repeatedly reached an impasse. Two states (Arizona and Nevada) are swing states, adding political complexity to any steps lawmakers—or the federal government—take.

The Interior Department has threatened to impose its own plan if states can't agree on a plan to manage the river after next year, when the current arrangement expires.

Jane Austen Turns 250

Jane Austen fans marked the English novelist's 250th birthday yesterday, celebrating the author whose sharp wit and class satire helped redefine the modern novel. Austen published six major works, including "Emma" and "Pride and Prejudice"—the first four anonymously as "By a Lady," and the last two after her death at 41, credited to her name for the first time.

Her books have sold an estimated 30 million copies worldwide—with "Pride and Prejudice" accounting for more than 20 million—yet she earned less than £700 in her lifetime, roughly \$67K today. She is often credited with popularizing the "enemies-to-lovers" trope and has inspired dozens of film and television adaptations, along with countless modern retellings, including "Bridget Jones's Diary" ("Pride and Prejudice") and "Clueless" ("Emma").

Austen's novels remain staples of literature curricula worldwide. Commemorative events marking her birthday took place across the globe, particularly in the UK, where Austen-related tourism generates tens of millions each year.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Rob Reiner's son faces two first-degree murder charges in the deaths of the Hollywood director and his wife; charges carry possibility of the death penalty.

Second doctor convicted of selling Matthew Perry ketamine is sentenced to eight months of home supervision.

New York Knicks beat San Antonio Spurs to win NBA Cup Finals.

ParisSaint-Germain Football Club ordered to pay former player Kylian Mbappé \$70.6M in unpaid income. FIFA adds \$60 World Cup tickets amid price backlash.

Queen of Disco Donna Summer is posthumously inducted into Songwriters Hall of Fame; Summer died in 2012 at age 63.

Science & Technology

Trump administration pauses \$40B technology trade deal with the UK over London's digital regulations and food standards.

Meta launches app that allows users to watch Instagram Reels via Amazon Fire TV.

Astronomers report evidence of the first observed superkilonova, a double explosion of stars that may have produced gravitational waves, light, and heavy elements that serve as building blocks for stars and planets.

Italian brown bears evolved to be smaller and less aggressive due to close contact with humans, per genetic analysis.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close mixed (S&P 500 -0.2%, Dow -0.6%, Nasdaq +0.2%).

US unemployment rises to four-year high of 4.6% in November; employers added 64,000 jobs in November, while 105,000 jobs were lost in October.

AI coding startup Lovable reportedly valued at \$6.6B after latest funding round, more than triple the Swedish company's valuation in July.

Jared Kushner's firm withdraws from Paramount's takeover battle of Warner Bros. Discovery.

Gas prices fall to \$2.89 per gallon—lowest level since April 2021—amid higher supply and lower demand, partly due to improved vehicle fuel efficiency.

Politics & World Affairs

President Donald Trump widens travel ban to nationals from Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, South Sudan, Syria, and the Palestinian territories.

Trump to deliver prime-time address to the nation at 9 pm ET tonight.

Trump orders blockade of sanctioned oil tankers entering Venezuela.

Police release new photos of unidentified Brown University gunman as search enters fifth day; see live updates.

Annual Arctic report finds last season was the hottest in the past 125 years; rivers are turning bright orange as warm temperatures release iron from the ground.

Groton Boys Dominate Sisseton Behind Press Defense, Balanced Scoring

SISSETON — A relentless defensive press and unselfish offense powered the Groton Area boys basketball team to a decisive 66-33 Northeast Conference victory over Sisseton on Tuesday night.

Groton seized control early, ripping off a 19-point run in the first half to open a 20-4 lead after one quarter and pushing the margin to 24-4 early in the second. By halftime, the Tigers had built a commanding 45-12 advantage and led 56-33 after three quarters on the way to the 33-point win.

"Defensively we really stuck it to them," head coach Greg Kjellsen said. "We got a lot more out of our press, which got our offense going."

The Tigers' pressure defense translated into efficient offense. Groton converted 23-of-31 two-point attempts for 74 percent shooting, while going 4-of-15 from 3-point range and 8-of-15 at the free-throw line. Groton finished with 17 rebounds, 15 assists, 12 steals, and just five turnovers.

Despite the lopsided halftime score, Kjellsen said there were still details to tighten up.

"We felt we could rebound better," he said. "They were getting their hands on some loose balls, and offensively, when we ran our sets, we didn't always run them very well. Those were the two things we wanted to clean up."

Ryder Johnson led the Tigers with 17 points, adding three rebounds, two assists, and four steals. Becker Bosma scored 11 points with five rebounds, three assists, and two steals, while Keegen Tracy added 11 points and two rebounds. Karson Zac finished with 13 points, two assists, and three steals. Gage Sippel chipped in five points with two rebounds, two assists, and a steal. Easton Weber had four points, three assists, and a steal, Ethan Kroll added three points and a rebound, and Anthony Tracy scored two points. Logan Warrington recorded two rebounds and three assists, and Jayden Schwan had a rebound.

The balanced scoring effort was exactly what Kjellsen wants from his group.

"On this team, we've got five, six, seven stars," he said. "On any given night, any one of them can step up, and tonight it was truly a team effort."

Kjellsen also pointed to ball movement and inside-out play as an emphasis in practice, noting the impact of Gage Sippel's presence.

"That's something we emphasized this week—getting out and running, moving the ball, and playing inside-out," he said. "Gage is a big key to our team. When he gets going and teams have to guard him hard, it really opens up the perimeter."

Sisseton was led by Carter Strickland with 12 points and Josh Donnell with 10. Levi Nelson scored four points, Derrick Flute had three, and Vincent Donnell added two. The Redmen shot 11-of-33 from the field, went 4-of-7 at the line, and committed 11 turnovers.

Groton improves to 2-0 on the season and will face a major early test Friday on the road against West Central, a team Kjellsen holds in high regard.

"I think West Central is one of the best five teams in the state, any class," Kjellsen said. "Sioux Falls Christian and West Central are as good as anybody. We'll have to be on our A-game, especially playing down there, but we'll give it our best shot."

JV: Sisseton defeated Groton 40-25 in junior varsity action. Groton led 11-7 after the first quarter and 15-14 at halftime, but Sisseton moved in front 24-19 after three quarters and pulled away in the fourth. Jordan Schwan led Groton with seven points, while Ethan Kroll and Anthony Tracy scored six apiece. Asher Johnson added four points and Ryder Schelle scored two. Reggie Lincoln paced Sisseton with 16 points, and Karter Deutch added 11.

Groton also won the C game 49-19.

The games were broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM. Rich Bosma provided the play-by-play of the varsity game, sponsored by Agtegra, Avantara, Bary Keith at Harr Motors, Bierman Farm Service, Blocker Construction, Dacotah Bank, Full Circle Ag, Groton Ag Partners, Groton Chamber, Groton Ford, Heartland Energy, John Sieh Agency, Jungle Cafe and Lanes and The MeatHouse. Jerry and Becca Johnson sponsored the junior varsity game, called by Paul Kosel.

Groton Area girls earn first win with 40-36 road victory over Sisseton

SISSETON — The Groton Area girls basketball team earned its first win of the season Tuesday night, holding off Sisseton 40-36 in a hard-fought Northeast Conference battle on the road.

"This is a tough place to play," Groton Area head coach Matt Locke said afterward. "I didn't think we got much done in the first half, but I thought we showed improvement in the second half."

The game was tightly contested from the opening tip, with the lead changing hands three times in the first quarter and the score tied once. Sisseton held a slim 6-5 advantage at the end of the opening period. Groton answered early in the second quarter to even the score, and neither team was able to create separation as the half ended tied 13-13.

Sisseton again struck first in the third quarter, taking a 15-13 lead, before Groton responded to tie the game at 15. The Redmen continued to hold a narrow edge through much of the quarter, carrying a 22-21 lead into the final eight minutes.

Groton took control early in the fourth quarter with a decisive nine-point run, turning a one-point deficit into a 32-26 advantage. The Tigers relied on defensive pressure and timely stops down the stretch to hang on for the four-point win.

"Our guards really set the tone," Locke said. "Those kids have motors — Jerica, Kenna, Taryn. When they put their minds to it, they can really guard. We've just got to be smart and avoid those 80-foot fouls, because those will kill you."

Locke also credited his team's aggressiveness for putting Sisseton in foul trouble.

"We did a good job being physical and going to the basket," he said. "We got them in a bunch of foul trouble, and that was big for us."

Groton shot 31 percent from the field, finishing 12-of-39 on two-point attempts and 2-of-14 from beyond the arc. The Tigers were 10-of-25 at the free-throw line, an area Locke acknowledged still needs improvement.

"We were just missing layups and couldn't make free throws when we got there," Locke said. "But we did the hard work. And when we needed to ice it late, we made the ones that mattered."

Groton finished with 31 rebounds, six assists, 16 steals, and 11 turnovers while committing 19 fouls.

Taryn Traphagen led the Tigers with 11 points, adding three rebounds, one assist, and one steal. McKenna Tietz added nine points and four steals, while Mia Crank contributed five points, two rebounds, two assists, and three steals off the bench.

"Mia has stepped up both games this year," Locke said. "She gives us a spark when she comes in. She accepts her role, played her butt off, and made some big plays for us."

Jerica Locke finished with five points, six rebounds, three assists, and four steals. Rylee Dunker added five points and nine rebounds before fouling out, while Jaedyn Penning scored two points with eight rebounds and two steals and also fouled out. Sydney Locke scored three points, and Kella Tracy recorded one rebound.

Sisseton was led by Piper Langager with 14 points, while Elliot Hortness added 11. Fallon Hawkins scored six points, Harper Hortness and Kennedy Hanson each had two, and Maylee Bravebull added two. The Redmen shot 24 percent from the field and went 13-of-16 at the free-throw line, committing 22 turnovers.

Late-game execution was a teaching moment for the Tigers, Locke admitted.

"We had a stretch where we took some good shots a little early in the shot clock when we were up seven," Locke said. "I told them to work it around more, and that wasn't what they needed to hear — they got passive. I told them in the locker room that one was on me. But they came back, made the plays, and got the stops when they needed to."

Groton also earned a win in the junior varsity game, defeating Sisseton 41-19. Kella Tracy recorded a triple-double with 15 points, 10 rebounds, and 11 steals. Ashlynn Warrington scored eight points, Makenna Krause had six, Teagan Hanton added five, Ryelle Gilbert scored two, and Tevan Hanson added two. Syd-

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ney Locke and Kinsley Rowen each scored one.

"A win's a win, especially on the road against a hungry team," Locke said. "We'll enjoy this one, then get back to work."

Groton Area will return to action Friday with a road game at West Central.

The games were broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM. Rich Bosma provided the play-by-play of the varsity game, sponsored by Agtegra, Avantara, Bary Keith at Harr Motors, Bierman Farm Service, Blocker Construction, Dacotah Bank, Full Circle Ag, Groton Ag Partners, Groton Chamber, Groton Ford, Heartland Energy, John Sieh Agency, Jungle Cafe and Lanes and The MeatHouse. Grandparents sponsored the junior varsity game, called by Paul Kosel.

Conde National League

Dec. 15, 2025 Team Standings: Cubs 8, Pirates 5, Stooges 4, Giants 3, Mets 2, Braves 2

Men's High Games: Austin Schuelke 213, Butch Farmen 195, Skip Kettering 193.

Men's High Series: Austin Schuelke 520, Butch Farmen 519, Skip Kettering 497.

Women's High Games: Sam Bahr 166, Deb Schuelke 161, Amanda Moorhouse 159

Women's High Series: Sam Bahr 477, Joyce Walter 429, Suzie Easthouse 425

Name Released in Pennington County Fatal Crash

What: Single vehicle fatal crash

Where: SD Highway 240 and Big Foot Road, 11 miles south of Wall, SD

When: 6:45 p.m., Friday, December 12, 2025

Driver 1: Keith Olin Brummet, 20-year-old male from Wall, SD, fatal injuries

Vehicle 1: 2018 Nissan Murano

Seat belt Used: No

Pennington County, S.D.- One man died in a single vehicle crash 11 miles south of Wall, SD.

Preliminary crash information indicates Keith Olin Brummet, the driver of a 2018 Nissan Murano, was traveling southbound on SD 240, missed the curve and entered the ditch, coming to rest 50 feet down an embankment. Brummet was ejected from the vehicle and sustained fatal injuries.

The South Dakota Highway Patrol is investigating the crash. All information released so far is only preliminary.

The Highway Patrol is an agency of the South Dakota Department of Public Safety.

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Groton's Angel Tree coordinator, Tina Kosel, started delivering Angel Tree gifts throughout the community on Tuesday. As you can tell in the photo below, the garage is full of presents. Thanks to everyone who helped make Christmas a little brighter for many families.



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Groton Legion

Wings

Nite



Groton American Legion

Soon to be a Classic monthly "Legion Wings Nite"

Friday and Saturday

Dec. 19 & 20

6-10pm

What can \$20 get you?



for
Senior Citizens

or anyone using physical therapy
a gym membership at

15 N Main - Ste. 101

Open 24/7

GDI Living Fitness

Call/Text Paul at 605/397-7460

Call/Text Tina at 605/397-7285

for details



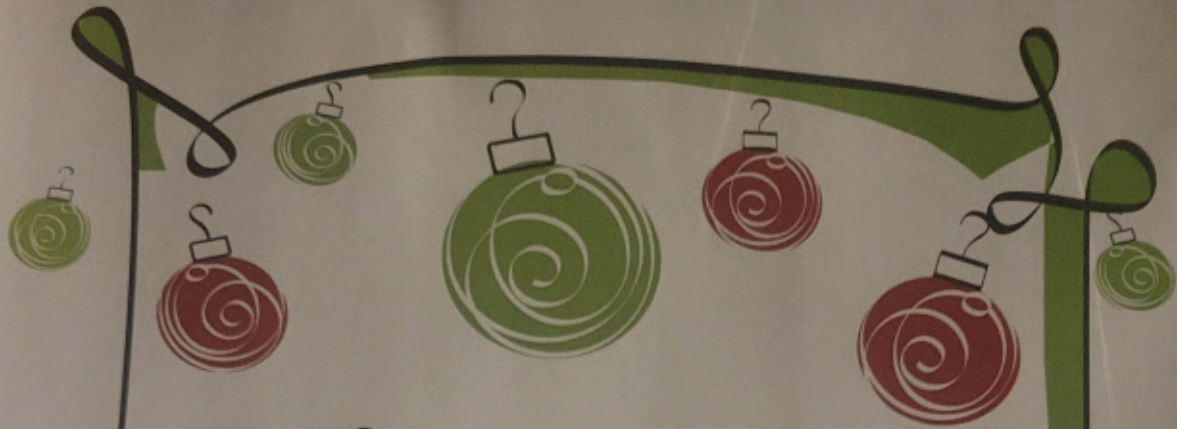
Annual Membership Rates

Student is \$29.82 per month or \$255.60 per year
Single is \$35.15 per month or \$319.50 per year
2-Person is \$55.45 per month or \$575.10 per year
Family is \$67.10 per month or \$702.26 per year

Month-to-Month Rates

Student is \$35.15 per month
Single is \$40.48 per month
2-Person is \$59.78 per month
Family is \$72.43 per month

**While many other rates have gone up, ours has not.
Same rates for several years!**



Groton Community Transit
Invites you to their

Holiday Bake Sale
Thursday, Dec. 18th,
2025

9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

**Coffee, cider and Christmas
goodies will be served!**

If you would like to donate baked goods, please contact Groton Community Transit
office at 605-397-8661. Any and all donations are welcome!! We are looking
forward to seeing you!!

Our address is 205 East 2nd Ave-Downtown Groton

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City fees, election dates approved during Tuesday's council meeting

By Elizabeth Varin

Recreation will cost a little more in Groton next year after the City Council on Tuesday approved updated fees for 2026, raising prices for swimming pool passes, City Park camping and several youth baseball and softball programs while leaving most other fees unchanged.

Among the changes approved were an increase in the cost of a family swimming pool pass from \$130 in 2025 to \$150 in 2026 and a hike in nightly camper fees at City Park from \$25 to \$30.

Several baseball and softball fees will also see changes. An adult season gate pass will increase from \$40 to \$50 and will now include regular-season games only. Gate passes for youth ages 17 and under will remain free.

Player registration fees for Legion, Junior Legion and Junior Teener baseball will remain at \$150 for the 2026 season, but the council approved the addition of a late registration fee. Players who register after the deadline will pay \$175. T-ball registration will increase from \$20 in 2025 to \$25 in 2026.

Girls softball fees will also increase. Registration will change from a \$30 fee plus a \$25 shirt fee in 2025 to a flat \$75 total in 2026. Late registration for girls softball will cost \$100.

The changed fees broken down

- Family pass for swimming pool increasing from \$130 (2025) to \$150 (2026)
- Camping fees for camper spots at the City Park increasing from \$25 (2025) to \$30 (2026)
- Season pass to attend baseball and softball games increasing from \$40 (2025) to \$50 (2026) and will now only include regular season ga
- A late fee will be added if registering baseball or softball players after the deadline.
 - o \$150 for Legion, Junior Legion or Junior Teener players (\$175 if registered after deadline)
 - o \$75 for U8, U10 and U12 boys players (\$100 if registered after deadline)
 - o \$75 for girls softball players, up from \$30 registration and \$25 T-shirt fee in 2025 (\$100 if registered after deadline)
 - o \$25 for T-ball players, up from \$20 in 2025 (\$50 if registered after deadline)

Some council members expressed concerns about registration fees becoming a barrier to kids being able to participate in baseball and softball. Councilman Jason Wambach, who is the city liaison for the baseball/softball foundation, emphasized there are scholarships available for kids whose families may have trouble paying the registration fees.

Councilwoman Karyn Babcock also asked city staff if there was something through the city to help offset some of those costs for kids who may need it.

In other business, the council approved second readings of ordinances setting salaries for city staff and transferring funds to keep the current year's budget balanced. Little discussion about the two ordinance took place at Tuesday's meetings as no changes had been made since the first reading of the ordinances at last week's meeting.

The council also identified which seats will be up for election in 2026 as the city prepares to move its municipal election. House Bill 1130 from the 2025 state legislative session required city and school board elections to be moved to align with state primary and general election dates.

Council members indicated interest in moving the election to June rather than November as it would be closer to April when elections have been held before in Groton.

Three two-year terms are ending in 2026 — Jon Cutler's seat in Ward 1, Brian Bahr's seat in Ward 2 and Jason Wambach's seat in Ward 3 — and Kevin Nehl's 1-year appointment in Ward 1 will also expire in 2026.

- City offices will be closed Thursday, January 1, 2026 for New Year's Day.
- The holiday lighting contest will be judged Dec. 18. Winners will receive utility bill credits totaling \$100, \$75 and \$50 respectively.
- 2026 dog licenses are due by Dec. 31, 2025. They can be purchased at City Hall.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

70% of children in South Dakota foster care are Native American, state says

Numerous other trends outlined in annual Child Protection Services report

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER

For the fourth year in a row, Native American children made up more than 70% of children in the South Dakota foster care system at the end of the state's fiscal year.

That's six times higher than Indigenous children's representation in the state's population. White children, by comparison, make up 70% of the state's population and 23% of the state's foster care population.

South Dakota officials have known Native American children are overrepresented in the foster care system for nearly half a century. Children who are removed from their homes and placed in foster care are more likely to be diagnosed with mental health disorders, to be involved in the criminal justice system or homeless, and to have their own children removed from their care, studies indicate.

The state Department of Social Services recently released its annual Child Protection Services report, detailing the number of children in foster care, how they're cared for and where they're discharged.

Of the state's 1,709 foster care children at the end of fiscal year 2025, according to the department, 1,201 were Native American.

State works to increase kinship care numbers

About 32% of children, regardless of their race, were placed in kinship care with relatives or close family friends, while 86% were placed in a "family setting" with a foster family. Kinship care falls within family settings.

Kinship care is up from 30% the year before, when the state first began releasing the data point.

The number of registered foster homes in the state for the 2025 fiscal year was 793 — the fewest since 2020. Of those homes, 93 — or nearly 12% — were Native American, up from 11% the prior year.

When children have to be removed from their homes, prioritizing kinship care (placing them with a relative or close family friend) can improve academic, behavioral and mental health outcomes, and allow the child to stay within their culture and community, according to Child Trends, a research organization focused on child welfare.

Department of Social Services Secretary Matt Althoff told South Dakota Searchlight in an emailed statement that kinship care is "a priority." The department implemented new licensed kinship foster homestandards in June, meant to remove barriers that kept potential kinship families from registering with the state.

"This permits kinship families to become licensed and receive financial support more quickly to meet the children's needs," Althoff said.

At-home intervention decreases by 13%

At-home intervention, without a child's removal or the court's involvement, decreased by 95 children this year.

Just under 500 children received at-home intervention services through the state Child Protection Services, including parental training and home management, according to a Searchlight data request answered by the department.

Interventions can include a "safety plan," which is a strategy created by a social worker to address safety concerns of at-risk families while a case is being investigated, and a "present danger plan," which involves families voluntarily letting a child live with another caregiver or having a person accused of maltreatment leave the home.

Another 122 children received other types of at-home interventions, such as a referral to counseling or other assistance, without further Child Protection Services involvement.

More children aging out of foster care system

Of the 984 children who left the child welfare system during the 2025 fiscal year:

423 were reunited with their families.

254 were adopted (54% by a foster parent and 36% by a relative).

72 were transferred to a tribal program.

108 were placed into a formal guardianship agreement.

34 were placed with a relative without guardianship or kinship licensure.

Five were transferred to the Department of Corrections or another agency.

Eighty-five children aged out of the system during fiscal year 2025, up by 20 from fiscal year 2024.

The state reported that 58% of children in the child welfare system are reunited with their families within a year — a gradual decrease each year from a 75% reunification rate in fiscal year 2020, the oldest data available on the department website.

Althoff said the department tracks reunification data to "ensure that efforts remain focused on child well-being and family stability." He added that many factors influence reunification timelines.

"These can include the willingness on the part of the birth parents to conform to behavioral changes described by the court, the complexity of family circumstances, availability of services, court scheduling, and the time needed to ensure a safe and stable environment for the child," Althoff said.

Two children ran away, both cases reported as 15-year-old females who were found, and one child died in state care. The child was a 15-year-old male who died "unrelated to child abuse and neglect," according to the department. The department did not disclose the cause of death.

Makenzie Huber is a lifelong South Dakotan who regularly reports on the intersection of politics and policy with health, education, social services and Indigenous affairs. Her work with South Dakota Searchlight earned her the title of South Dakota's Outstanding Young Journalist in 2024, and she was a 2024 finalist for the national Livingston Awards.

\$300 million Sanford gift ranks as fifth biggest charitable donation of the year

BY: SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT STAFF

A \$300 million gift from South Dakota philanthropist Denny Sanford to Sanford Health to support the construction of a new medical center in Rapid City was the fifth largest charitable donation in the country this year, according to The Chronicle of Philanthropy.

The publication revealed its list of the biggest charitable contributions of 2025 on Tuesday.

The annual rankings are based on the biggest publicly announced gifts. The tally does not include contributions of artwork, gifts from anonymous donors, or donations that cannot be confirmed as going to a 501(c)3 nonprofit.

The biggest gifts on this year's list:

\$2 billion, Phil Knight, co-founder of athletic wear company Nike, and his wife, Penny, to the Oregon Health & Science University for the Knight Cancer Institute.

\$746.7 million, Warren Buffett, chairman and CEO of Berkshire Hathaway, a holding company, to the Susan Thompson Buffett Foundation.

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\$500 million, Jackie and Mike Bezos, Amazon founder Jeff Bezos's mother and stepfather, to Unicef USA for the Child Nutrition Fund.

\$301 million*, Greg Williams, co-founder of Acrisure, a financial technology company, and his wife, Dawn, to Michigan State University primarily for athletics.

\$300 million, Denny Sanford, founder of First Premier Bank and chairman of United National Corporation, to Sanford Health primarily for the Sanford Black Hills Medical Center.

\$300 million, David Booth, co-founder of Dimensional Fund Advisors, an investment firm, to the University of Kansas Athletics for the David Booth Kansas Memorial Stadium.

\$202.9 million, Michael Moritz, a partner at Sequoia Capital, and his wife, Harriet Heyman, a sculptor, through their Crankstart Foundation, to the American Friends of the National Gallery London for museum expansion.

\$199.1 million, Warren Buffett, to the Howard G. Buffett Foundation.

\$199.1 million, Warren Buffett, to the NoVo Foundation.

\$199.1 million, Warren Buffett, to the Sherwood Foundation.

*Greg and Dawn Williams' donation to Michigan State University was announced in December as a \$401 million donation. The Chronicle confirmed that \$100 million of the donation will go to a university-affiliated entity that is not a 501(c)3 organization.

States crack down on aggressive driving

Road behavior got worse during the pandemic, and traffic enforcement declined

BY: SHALINA CHATLANI

NEW YORK — On a frigid December morning along busy Broadway in the Astoria neighborhood of Queens, New York, pedestrians walk rapidly toward the subway. Cars and e-bikes speed along a busy two-lane road and blast through sharp turns during the early rush to get to the office.

In recent years on this stretch of Broadway, cars have struck and killed pedestrians, crashed into businesses, and collided with parking meters, ripping them out of the ground.

For nearly 50 years, John Arvanitis has owned the Omonia Café on Broadway. He said he doesn't see much enforcement of traffic laws.

"They have a sign that says '25,' but sometimes people go fast. They'll go past the light," said Arvanitis, 70. He added that motorcycles and bikes speed down the street too.

One of his diners, 58-year-old Gail Grigaux, chimed in to say that she often sees vehicles buzzing through red lights — and even barreling down the sidewalk.

"There's all these mopeds and e-bikes that are really dangerous. Just walking on the street and all of a sudden they zoom right by you," Grigaux said. "It's really frightening because I'm helping my elderly mother, and she can't respond that quickly to get out of the way."

Between 2013 and 2022, the number of traffic-related deaths in the United States increased by nearly 23%, from 32,893 to 42,514, according to a March report by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Pedestrian deaths increased by 50% during the same period, the most recent for which numbers are available.

The CDC noted that the U.S. fared poorly compared with 27 other high-income countries, where all road-related deaths decreased by a median of more than 19% and pedestrian fatalities declined by a median of nearly 25%.

State legislators have noticed.

This year, Virginia and Washington enacted laws requiring the installation of speed limiting devices in the vehicles of drivers with multiple speeding or reckless driving violations. New Hampshire and Wisconsin are considering similar legislation to stop so-called super speeders.

So is New York. Democratic state Sen. Andrew Gounardes, the sponsor of New York's bill, said in an

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interview that the state has increasingly used automated enforcement tools such as speed cameras in school zones and red-light cameras, but that "it became clear that there was a stubborn subset of drivers who continued to pose a problem because of their repeat recidivism and recklessness."

Gouardes' bill would require the installation of a speed limiting device if a driver accumulates 11 or more points on their driving record during a two-year period, or receives six or more speed camera or red-light camera tickets in a year.

This year's legislation in New York and other states comes after a flurry of activity last year, when nine states (Alabama, California, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Utah, plus Washington, D.C.) enacted 19 measures to curb aggressive or reckless driving, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures, a bipartisan policy research group.

In New York, the state Senate approved Gouardes' bill in June and sent it to the Assembly, where it is stuck in committee. He said that while nobody in either party supports dangerous driving, it can be difficult to push through legislation to curb it. He said some of his colleagues seem to believe that "drivers are entitled to special treatment and that any efforts to hold drivers accountable impinges upon that God-given American right to be free behind the wheel."

Nevertheless, he said he is confident that the legislation eventually will become law.

But Dawn Riendeau, who lives in Queens, knows how difficult it can be to get New York lawmakers to place any limits on drivers. In 2008, her 14-year-old daughter, Angelica Nappi, was killed when a driver with several license suspensions ran a red light and struck the vehicle she was in. For 16 years, Riendeau urged state legislators to approve a law to keep high-risk drivers with multiple license suspensions off the road. It finally went into effect last year.

"I was back and forth with Albany, many of the assemblymen and the senators — they didn't like the way the law was worded. They thought it was too harsh," Riendeau told Stateline. "It's just a stepping stone, and there's definitely much more work that has to be done in order to make our roadway safer, and legislation more punitive."

"Driving is a privilege, and when you get behind the wheel of a car, you have to be very conscious of the decisions that you make," Riendeau added. "You really can cause a lot of lifetime damage to people."

Officers pulling back

Jessica Cicchino, senior vice president of research at the nonprofit Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, said dangerous driving worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic, when roads emptied and people were under tremendous stress.

"We saw a lot of changes in risky behavior nationwide, more broadly, during the pandemic," Cicchino said. "We saw people behaving in risky ways, even outside of their cars."

But Cicchino noted that traffic enforcement also declined during the pandemic, as officers were encouraged to social distance and to limit unnecessary interactions with residents.

Even before the pandemic, there was rising pressure on police to scale back traffic enforcement. Critics said police disproportionately pulled over Black and Hispanic drivers, and noted that many instances of police misconduct took place during traffic stops. Many officers, increasingly wary of being accused of abuse or racism — or being involved in deadly encounters — were happy to pull back.

As a result, the number of traffic stops and citations issued declined precipitously, according to a July report by The New York Times. In some places, the newspaper reported, traffic enforcement still hadn't returned to pre-pandemic levels by 2023.

In New York City, for example, the number of traffic citations issued in 2023 was still 37% lower than in 2018. Between 2019 and 2022, the number of traffic-related deaths in New York rose by 11%.

In other cities where the number of traffic stops or traffic citations lagged post-pandemic, there was an even greater spike in traffic-related deaths: In Memphis, Tennessee, deaths increased by 74%, in Philadelphia they increased by 58%, and in Seattle they were up 39%.

Scott Hall is the owner of the comedy club Grove 34 in Astoria, where he also lives. He said that in his neighborhood, "It's literally organized street racing all night. They do doughnuts in the intersections."

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"Anything past 11 o'clock at night is very dangerous to be walking around," said Hall, 34. He said he believes that if the police were present, "it just wouldn't happen."

Another Astoria resident, 39-year-old Jill Wurzburg, started an online petition calling on the local police to step up traffic enforcement after a woman in her neighborhood mothers' group was nearly hit by a car in June while walking with her toddler. A stroller was mangled in the incident but nobody was harmed. The petition has garnered more than 660 signatures so far.

"In the last five years, enforcement of traffic violations has dropped. Ignoring moving violations gives tacit permission to drivers to continue bad behavior, and every parent has noticed how reckless and aggressive drivers in our neighborhood have become," the petition says.

"As long as there are no consequences for driving recklessly, drivers will continue to do it."

The petition notes that a 7-year-old girl was struck and killed by a car in 2023. As the mother of a small child, Wurzburg said she feels unsafe walking around the neighborhood.

"There's just this culture in Astoria, it seems, of prioritizing drivers over everybody else. And I'm someone who drives to work every day," she said. "I think that the driving culture here is very dangerous to pedestrians, cyclists and drivers."

The power of technology

But it's difficult to establish a direct causal relationship between traffic enforcement and traffic deaths — in some cases, aggressive traffic enforcement can increase the danger by precipitating high-speed chases. In New York City, for example, police-involved car crashes spiked last year.

Some advocates see the greater use of technology, such as speed limiters, as a powerful solution.

Cathy Chase, president of Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety, a group that lobbies for laws to create safer roads, said the group wants to see more state laws mandating speed assistance technology. She said the group also wants more use of speeding and red-light cameras.

"If people know that they might get a ticket for running a red light or speeding, they're less likely to engage in that behavior," Chase told Stateline. "These automated enforcement systems should be in use in all localities where aggressive and reckless driving is an issue."

In Washington, state Rep. Mari Leavitt, who sponsored the speed limiter bill signed into law this year, said the measure passed quickly with broad bipartisan support — notable because new traffic safety laws are often contentious. The new law mandates the installation of speed detection technology in the vehicles of repeat offenders or under a judge's order.

"People are dying. In Washington state the top two reasons people die on the roads is because of DUIs and excessive speeding," said Leavitt, a Democrat. "This is a really effective tool that is new and innovative that will save lives."

Other jurisdictions, including Queens, believe that engineering changes can make a huge difference.

In November 2024, the New York City Department of Transportation touted the completion of a nine-year project to improve Queens Boulevard — once known to residents as the "Boulevard of Death" because of its high number of traffic fatalities. The changes include parking-protected curbside bike lanes; pedestrian islands to shorten crossing distances and encourage drivers to make slower, safer turns; and adjustments to traffic signal timing to give pedestrians more time to cross before lights turn green for drivers.

"Now, thanks to changes to the street's design, traffic injuries and fatalities are down and the street is safer for everyone," Ydanis Rodriguez, the city's traffic commissioner, said in a statement at the time.

The project, Rodriguez said, "serves as a reminder that our street redesigns save lives — regardless of whether you are biking, driving, or walking."

Stateline reporter Shalina Chatlani can be reached at schatlani@stateline.org.

This story was originally produced by Stateline, which is part of States Newsroom, a nonprofit news network which includes South Dakota Searchlight, and is supported by grants and a coalition of donors as a 501c(3) public charity.

Shalina Chatlani covers health care and environmental justice for Stateline.

Lawmaker views on Caribbean strikes unchanged after Hegseth briefing

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY

WASHINGTON — U.S. senators left a closed-door meeting Tuesday with Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth and Secretary of State Marco Rubio split over the Trump administration's strikes on alleged drug-running vessels near Venezuela, particularly an early September follow-up strike that killed two survivors clinging to boat wreckage.

Hegseth and Rubio delivered the all-member briefings to Senate and House lawmakers on Capitol Hill as the death toll from U.S. military strikes on alleged drug traffickers in the Caribbean Sea and eastern Pacific Ocean has surpassed 90, and as U.S. Navy ships are amassed off the coast of Venezuela.

Controversy over the possibility of war crimes during the Sept. 2 follow-on strike that killed shipwrecked survivors drew attention after The Washington Post reported details last month, calling into question Hegseth's orders.

Hegseth told reporters Tuesday he briefed members on a "highly successful mission to counter designated terrorist organizations, cartels, bringing weapons — weapons, meaning drugs — to the American people and pois

Dems decry edited video

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer told reporters Hegseth again refused to show unedited footage, which Schumer described as "deeply troubling," of a second strike on Sept. 2 that killed two people who survived the initial strike.

"The administration came to this briefing empty handed," Schumer, D-N.Y., said.

"If they can't be transparent on this, how can you trust their transparency on all the other issues swirling about in the Caribbean? Every senator is entitled to see it. There is no problem with (revealing) sources and methods" because the senators will view it in the Sensitive Compartmented Information Facility, a secure area of the Capitol where classified information is generally shared.

Schumer added that an "appropriate version" of the video should be disclosed to the public.

Senate Republicans downplayed loud concerns from Democrats, pointing to former President Barack Obama's numerous counterterrorism drone strikes in the Middle East.

"We've been using the same technique for 24 years, and nothing has changed except the hemisphere," said Sen. Markwayne Mullin, R-Okla.

Public release called for

Hegseth told reporters the unedited video will be shown to members of the Senate and House committees on the Armed Services Wednesday, alongside Admiral Frank Bradley, commander of U.S. Special Operations Command, who oversaw the strikes.

Hegseth did not address why the department declined to show the unedited video to all 100 senators.

He did say, "Of course, we're not going to release a top-secret, full, unedited video of that to the general public."

Several Democratic senators have called for the video to be publicly released.

Sen. Chris Coons, D-Del., said he was told during the meeting that the video won't be released because of "classification concerns."

"It is hard to square the widespread, routine, prompt posting of detailed videos of every strike, with a concern that posting a portion of the video of the first strike would violate a variety of classification concerns," Coons said.

Coons added "it's increasingly important that the national security team of the Trump administration increasingly respect and recognize the role and power of Congress."

He highlighted a provision in Congress's annual defense authorization bill that compels Hegseth to re-

lease the video or lose 25% of his travel budget. The massive defense bill is expected to pass this week.

Body count from boat strikes rising

U.S. Southern Command posted a video on social media Monday night of the military's latest strikes on three boats "operated by Designated Terrorist Organizations in international waters" in the eastern Pacific. The strikes killed eight people, according to the post.

President Donald Trump has officially promoted his military actions in the Caribbean as a fight against drug trafficking and overdose deaths in the United States, particularly from illicit fentanyl.

On Monday Trump issued an order declaring the powerful synthetic opioid as a "Weapon of Mass Destruction."

The smuggling routes for illicit fentanyl and the chemicals used to make it follow the path from China to Mexico to the U.S., and is highlighted as such in the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency's 2025 National Drug Threat Assessment.

The administration has designated several drug cartels as foreign terrorist organizations, including "Cartel de los Soles," an alleged Venezuelan group that the Department of State described as spearheaded by Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro.

Trump has hinted at a land invasion of the South American country.

When asked by States Newsroom on Tuesday whether Hegseth addressed during the meeting what type of drugs were alleged to be in the targeted boats, Mullin and Sen. Dan Sullivan, R-Alaska, said cocaine.

"We've always heard it's mainly cocaine. It doesn't matter. It's drugs," Mullin said.

Sullivan said "it's the same groups" smuggling the cocaine as the ones smuggling fentanyl.

Cocaine mixed with illicit fentanyl has become "an increasing public safety concern" over the last eight years, according to the National Drug Threat Assessment.

Overall, all U.S. drug overdose deaths have decreased in recent years, according to the assessment and latest data published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Ashley Murray covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include domestic policy and appropriations.

No US House vote to extend health care subsidies, Speaker Johnson says

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT

WASHINGTON — U.S. House Speaker Mike Johnson said Tuesday he will not allow a floor vote this week on a bipartisan amendment supported by moderate Republicans that would extend the Affordable Care Act enhanced tax credits.

Johnson was confident that blocking the amendment would not lead centrist GOP lawmakers to oppose the Republican health care bill scheduled to get a vote Wednesday.

"There's about a dozen members in the conference that are in these swing districts who are fighting hard to make sure they reduce costs for all of their constituents. And many of them did want to vote on this Obamacare, COVID-era subsidy the Democrats created," Johnson said. "We looked for a way to try to allow for that pressure release valve and it just was not to be."

The enhanced ACA tax credits are set to expire at the end of the year, sharply increasing the cost of health insurance for the roughly 22 million Americans who purchase plans through the exchange and benefit from the subsidies.

The House Republican health care bill wouldn't extend those tax credits, frustrating GOP lawmakers in that chamber who are most at risk of losing their reelection bids during the November midterm elections.

Johnson said he expects that GOP bill will pass, though he didn't address its prospects in the Senate, where bipartisanship is needed for nearly all bills to advance under that chamber's 60-vote legislative

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filibuster.

The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office and the staff of the Joint Committee on Taxation's analysis of the bill shows it would reduce the federal deficit by \$35.6 billion during the next decade.

An average of 100,000 people per year would lose health insurance between 2027 and 2035, while gross benchmark premiums for health insurance would drop by 11% on average through 2035, according to the joint analysis.

'Idiotic and shameful'

New York Republican Rep. Mike Lawler said in a speech on the House floor that GOP leaders' decision to let the enhanced ACA tax credits expire was "idiotic and shameful," especially after changes were added to address fraud and reduce costs.

"So we have been forced to sign onto two discharge petitions," he said. "And yet my Democratic colleagues will not join us, but for those that were at the negotiation table."

Lawler then criticized House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, of New York, for not encouraging Democrats to sign onto the bipartisan discharge petitions, noting that would likely get the 218 signatures needed to force a floor vote. He argued that's because Jeffries "doesn't actually want to solve the problem, he wants the issue."

"This place is disgraceful," Lawler said. "Everybody wants the upper hand. Everybody wants the political advantage. They don't actually want to do the damn work. This problem could be solved today if everybody who says they care about extending this signs the discharge."

GOP-only bill in 2026?

When the House returns from its two-week holiday break next year, Johnson said, leaders may try to use the complex reconciliation process they used to enact the "one big, beautiful bill" to address health care.

"What we anticipate going into the first quarter of next year is, possibly in a reconciliation package or in regular order a stand-alone, ideas just like this," Johnson said after being asked a question about Health Savings Accounts. "We have a long list of things that we know will reduce premiums, increase access and quality of care."

President Donald Trump said Monday he wants Republicans to use the reconciliation process or to eliminate the Senate's legislative filibuster to address health care and other policy priorities.

"Republicans should knock out the filibuster and we should approve a lot of things," Trump said.

Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., has said repeatedly he doesn't intend to change or scrap the filibuster.

Direct payments or tax breaks

Trump also reiterated during the Oval Office event he would like to see Congress send direct payments to Americans to help them buy health insurance or afford health care.

"I want all money going to the people and let the people buy their own health care. It'll be unbelievable," Trump said. "They'll do a great job. They'll get much better health care at a much lower cost."

The Senate voted last week on two health care bills, one from Republicans and one from Democrats, but neither received the support needed to move toward a final passage vote.

Republicans' bill would have provided direct payments to some people enrolled in either bronze or catastrophic ACA marketplace plans with up to \$1,500 in payments annually for 2026 and 2027.

Democrats' legislation would have extended the enhanced ACA marketplace tax credits for three years.

Cost most urgent issue, poll finds

A bipartisan group of senators is trying to find solutions that bridge the political divide, though they are unlikely to achieve consensus on the details before the end of this week.

Thune said during a press conference Tuesday he believes there's a way to address the rising costs of

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health care if Democrats continue negotiations with Republicans.

"Our views on health care and the Democratic views on health care are very different. And I think that's a difficult challenge that we have to figure out how to overcome," Thune said. "But if they're willing to accept changes that actually would put more power and control and resources in the hands of the American people and less of that in the pockets of the insurance companies, then I think there is a path forward."

Thune acknowledged that Congress cannot pass anything this week but said he believes "there's a potential pathway in January if Democrats are willing to come to the table on things that will actually drive down the costs of health care."

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., didn't entirely rule out using the Jan. 30 government funding deadline to force a partial shutdown over health care, though he implied nothing can be done on the ACA tax credits after they expire at the end of December.

"Once it expires, the toothpaste is out of the tube," Schumer said.

A poll released Monday by the West Health-Gallup Center on Healthcare in America shows that cost is the "most urgent" health issue facing the country, followed by access and then obesity.

Just 57% of those polled said they were satisfied with how much they pay for their own health care and only 16% were satisfied with the total cost of health care.

Nearly two-thirds of those in the survey said they believe it's the federal government's responsibility "to make sure all Americans have healthcare coverage," while 33% said it's not.

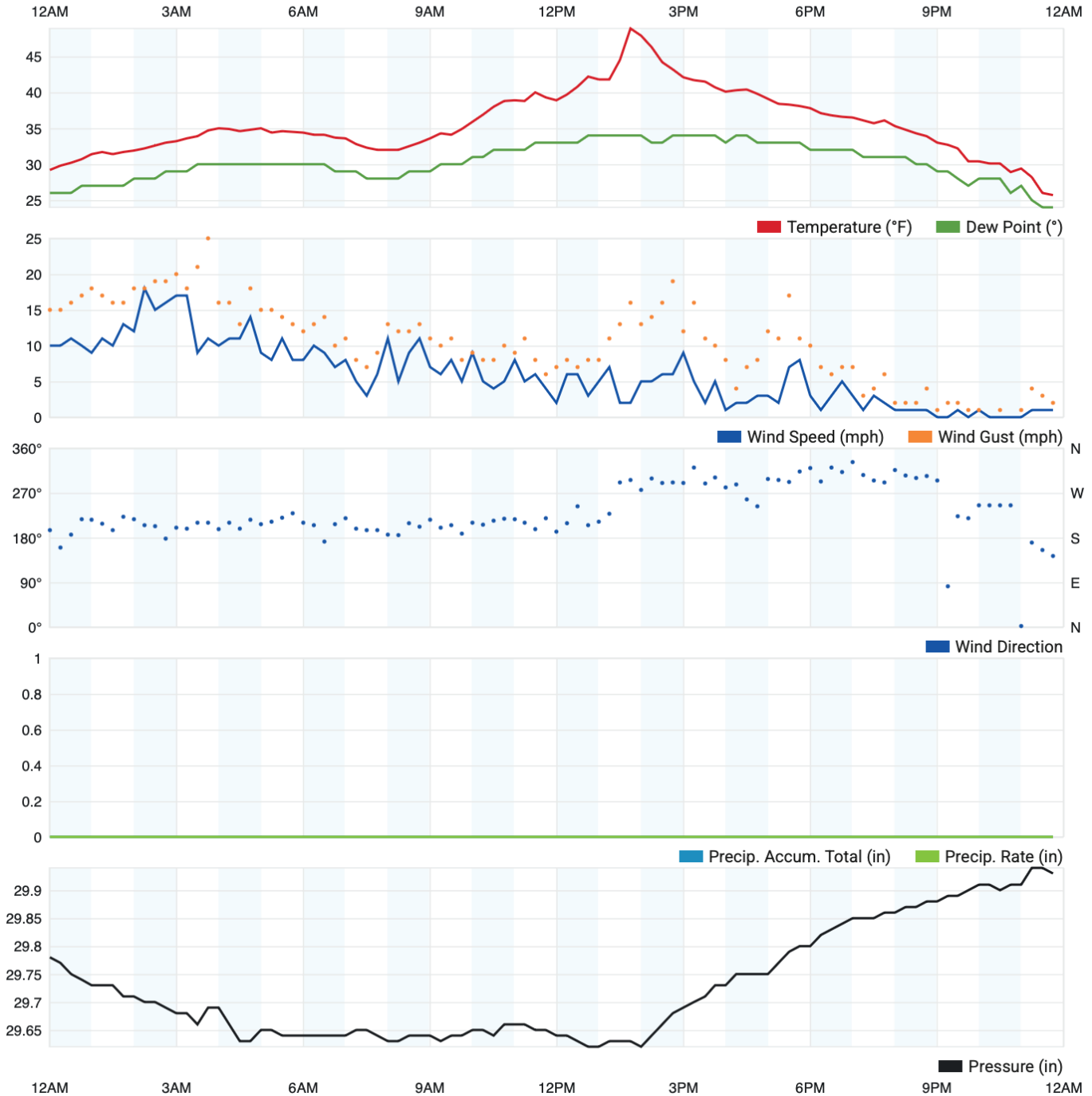
Jennifer covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include congressional policy, politics and legal challenges with a focus on health care, unemployment, housing and aid to families.

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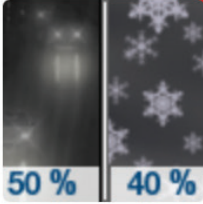



Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

December 16, 2025



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Today	Tonight	Thursday	Thursday Night	Friday
				
High: 42 °F	Low: 13 °F	High: 18 °F ↓	Low: -1 °F	High: 29 °F
Breezy. Partly Sunny then Chance Rain	Chance Rain and Breezy then Chance Snow and Windy	Chance Snow and Windy	Increasing Clouds	Mostly Cloudy



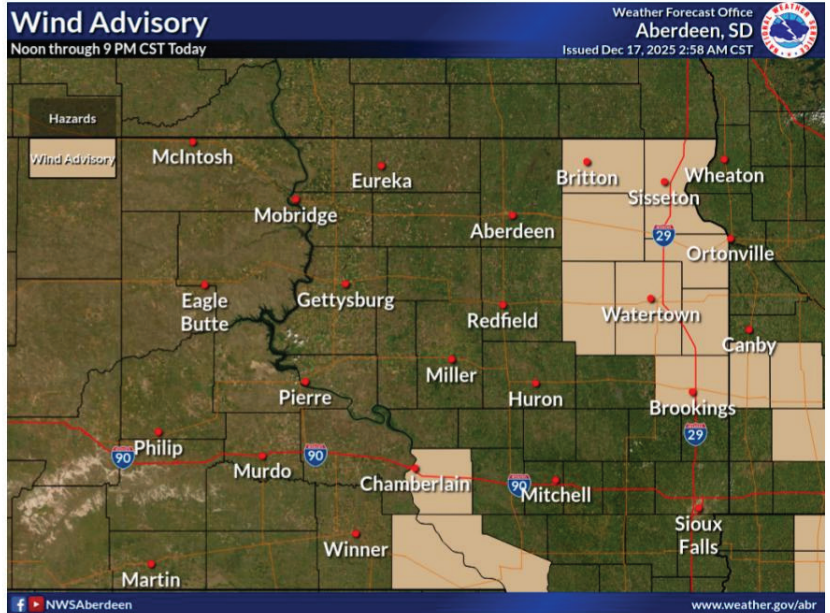
Wind Advisory Today

December 17, 2025
4:13 AM

Wind gusts up to 55 mph over northeastern SD

Key Messages:

- South winds, mainly over the Prairie Coteau/Sisseton Hills.
- Sustained winds 20-30 mph with **gusts up to 55 mph, with locally higher gusts possible.**
- Impacts: Gusty winds will blow around unsecured objects and a few power outages may result. Winds this strong can make driving difficult, especially for high profile vehicles.



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

A Wind Advisory has been issued from Noon through 9 PM CST today for winds of 20-30 mph and gusts up to 55 mph over and along the Prairie Coteau/Sisseton Hills area. Travel could be difficult, especially for high profile vehicles. High winds may cause property damage and power outages.

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Strong Winds Expected Thursday

December 17, 2025
4:15 AM

Wind gusts up to 65 mph over central SD

Key Messages:

- Northwest winds increase late this evening, peaking **Thursday morning through midday**.
 - Sustained winds 30 to 45 mph with **gusts up to 65 mph**.
 - Highest gusts will be over central South Dakota.**
- Impacts:** High winds may damage property and cause power outages. High winds and snow showers could limit visibility. **Travel could be difficult, especially for high profiles vehicles.**

NEW What Has Changed?

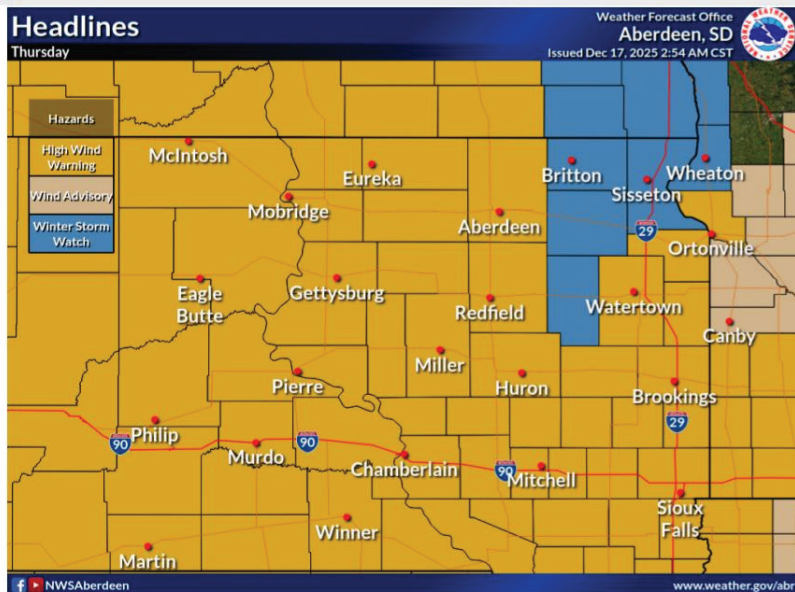
- High Wind Watch has been replaced with a **High Wind Warning**. A **Winter Storm Watch** remains in place for **blizzard conditions** possible over/along the Sisseton Hills

Next Scheduled Update:

- This afternoon



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

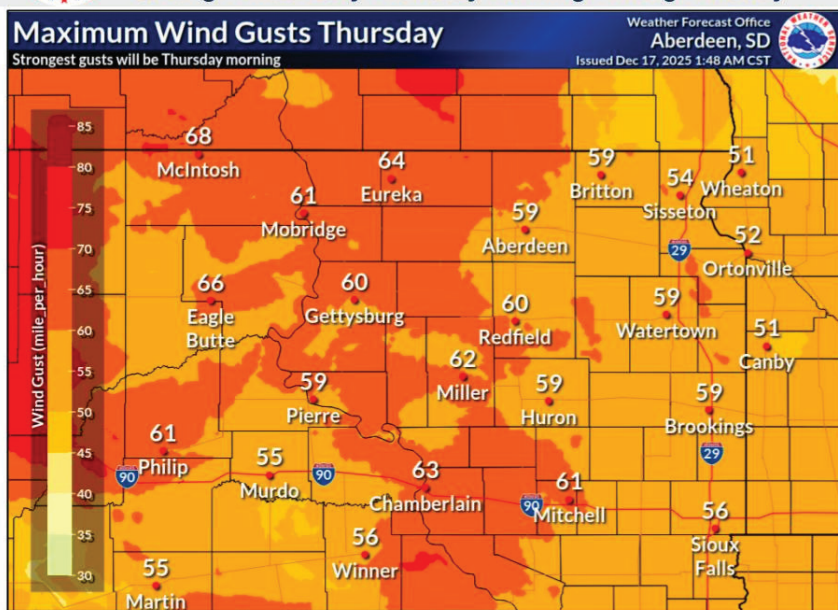


Wind Gusts and Timing Thursday

December 17, 2025
4:19 AM

Strong Winds Early Thursday Morning Through Midday

Peak Wind Timeframe



	Wed 9pm	12am	3am	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm
Aberdeen	32	40	49	58	56	51	43	21	13
Britton	39	40	48	59	58	55	46	25	15
Brookings	40	33	41	54	60	59	49	35	20
Chamberlain	32	38	53	64	64	54	44	23	14
Clark	36	37	44	56	59	58	49	28	20
Eagle Butte	55	58	62	66	58	46	24	14	20
Ellendale	41	49	58	62	61	55	47	21	13
Eureka	45	56	63	64	60	52	44	18	13
Gettysburg	39	48	56	60	58	51	37	18	16
Huron	30	37	51	59	60	59	46	25	15
Kennebec	40	43	53	60	58	54	38	20	16
McIntosh	60	67	68	66	59	48	37	13	20
Milbank	36	33	37	51	54	53	48	33	23
Miller	37	44	52	62	61	56	45	22	15
Mobridge	43	55	60	61	56	47	36	15	14
Murdo	41	43	52	55	49	44	30	16	18
Pierre	39	46	54	58	53	43	29	15	14
Redfield	32	38	47	60	60	58	46	23	15
Sisseton	37	37	40	54	54	53	45	32	20
Watertown	38	39	44	58	59	56	48	32	21
Webster	37	39	44	54	55	55	47	30	20

- Northwest Winds of 30-45 mph with gusts up to 65 mph expected. **Highest gusts over central South Dakota Thursday morning.**

Probably the most impactful part of this system will be the potential for snow squalls. There may be at least a band or two of intense snow along with the high winds, resulting in rapid reductions to visibility (even if there isn't much accumulation) and a significant travel hazard. Current timing on squalls is early Thursday morning.

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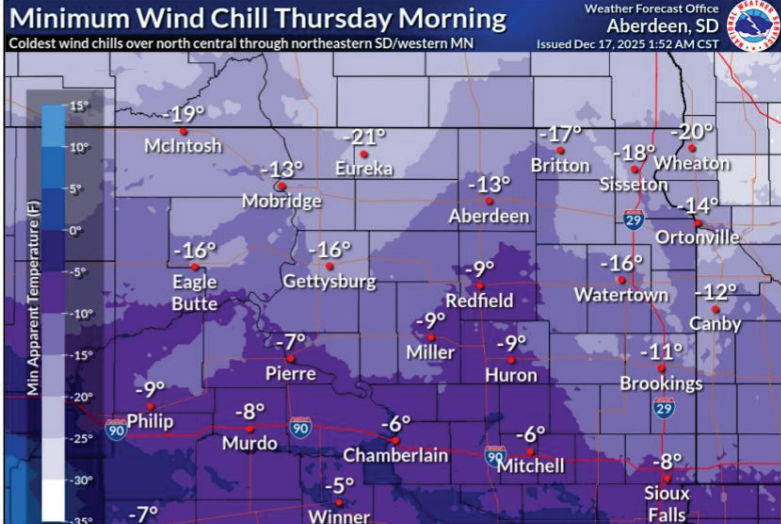
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Falling Temperatures Thursday

December 17, 2025
4:21 AM

Wind Chill values in the -10 to -20°F range



- Temperatures fall quickly tonight and continue to fall during the day Thursday. **Wind chills will drop down into the single digits to as low as 20 below zero.**
- Freezing temperatures could cause the rain that fell earlier to become ice, potentially making surfaces slippery.

Temperature Forecast (°F)

	12/17	12/18									
	Wed	9pm	12am	3am	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am
Aberdeen	38	34	31	20	13	11	11	8	5	1	4
Britton	36	34	30	21	11	9	7	3	0	-4	0
Brookings	45	44	34	28	20	13	11	8	5	1	3
Chamberlain	47	43	35	26	19	21	23	20	15	12	16
Clark	39	35	31	22	14	9	8	7	4	1	4
Eagle Butte	38	33	27	15	13	16	19	17	14	13	16
Ellendale	38	33	29	17	10	9	8	5	2	-2	1
Eureka	37	32	26	13	8	9	8	6	4	2	5
Gettysburg	38	33	30	16	11	13	14	12	9	7	11
Huron	45	42	34	26	18	16	16	11	8	5	8
Kennebec	44	37	35	24	18	20	22	20	16	13	16
McIntosh	35	31	18	11	9	12	14	13	10	9	12
Milbank	41	37	34	27	18	12	9	7	3	0	2
Miller	42	36	34	22	17	15	17	15	12	9	11
Mobridge	36	33	26	15	11	13	14	11	8	7	10
Murdo	42	36	34	24	17	21	24	21	17	16	19
Pierre	42	37	35	22	18	20	23	21	17	14	17
Redfield	40	36	32	22	16	14	14	12	9	5	7
Sisseton	40	37	33	24	14	8	7	4	2	-2	0
Watertown	40	36	32	24	16	11	8	7	3	0	2
Webster	38	35	31	21	12	8	6	4	1	-2	0
Wheaton	38	36	32	26	15	9	5	3	-1	-5	-3

Temperatures will fall quickly tonight into Thursday which could cause rain that fell earlier to freeze creating hazardous traveling conditions particularly on bridges, overpasses, and untreated roads. Wind chills will drop into the single digits to around 20 degrees below zero. Make sure to bundle up if you go outside and bring in your pets.

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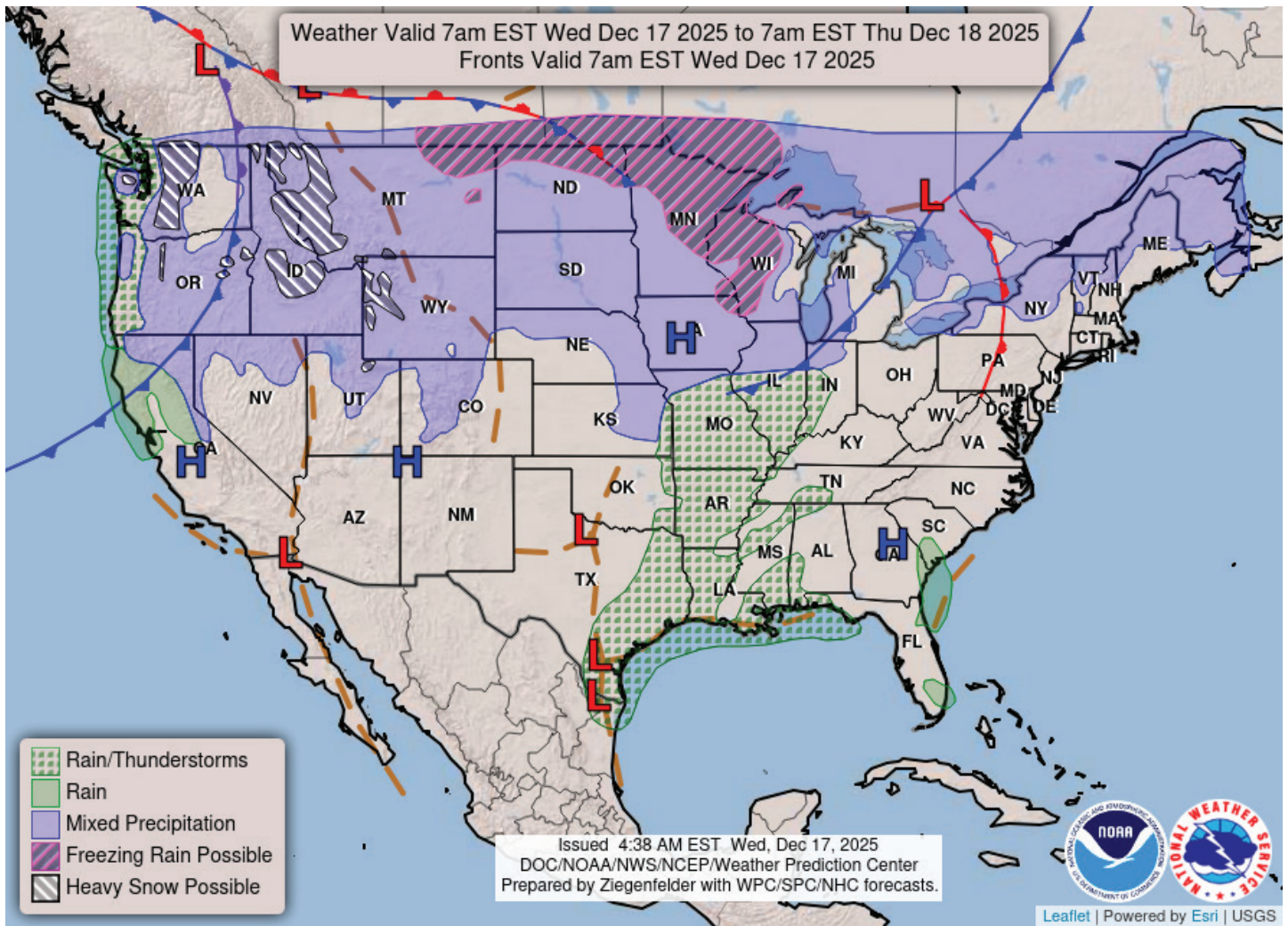
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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 49 °F at 1:43 PM
Low Temp: 26 °F at 11:27 PM
Wind: 25 mph at 3:37 AM
Precip: : 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 53 in 1939
Record Low: -32 in 2016
Average High: 28
Average Low: 7
Average Precip in Dec.: 0.32
Precip to date in Dec.: 0.60
Average Precip to date: 21.53
Precip Year to Date: 25.41
Sunset Tonight: 4:50 pm
Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:07 am



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Today in Weather History

December 17, 1993: A prolonged period of snow occurred from December 15th through the 19th over the western half of South Dakota. Several accidents leading to injuries occurred due to ice on the 15th, and many vehicles slid into ditches. Snowfall amounts were 4 to 10 inches. McIntosh received three inches of snow; Timber Lake, Murdo, and Selby received five inches of snow; and six inches accumulated at McLaughlin. Eagle Butte recorded seven inches of new snow.

1884 — A three week blockade of snow began at Portland, OR. A record December total of 34 inches was received. (David Ludlum)

December 17, 1903: Wilbur and Orville Wright made four brief flights at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina with their first powered aircraft on this day. After having success with their 5-foot biplane kite, the brothers realized the weather conditions in Dayton were not ideal for their flying experiments. They wrote the Weather Bureau in Washington, D.C. requesting a list of suitable places on the east coast where winds were constant. Below is the response the Wright Brothers received from Joseph Doshier, who staffed the Weather Bureau office, wrote in August of 1900 regarding the suitability of Kitty Hawk.

"Mr. Wilbur Wright

Dayton Ohio

Dear Sir,

In reply to yours of the 3rd, I will say the beach here is about one mile wide clear of trees or high hills, and islands for nearly sixty miles south. Conditions: the wind blows mostly from the North and Northeast September and October which is nearly down this piece of land. Giving you many miles of a steady wind with a free sweep. I am sorry to say that you could not rent a house here. So you will have to bring tents. You could obtain frame.

The only way to reach Kitty Hawk is from Manteo Roanoke Island N.C. in a small sail boat. From your letter I believe you would find it here like you wish. Will be pleased at any time to give you any information. Yours very respectfully

JJ. Doshier"

On December 17, with the winds were averaging more than 20 mph, Orville took a flight that lasted 12 seconds for a total distance of 120 feet.

December 17, 1924: From the Monthly Weather Review, "a severe glaze storm occurred in west-central Illinois on December 17 and 18, the area of great destruction embracing a territory about 75 miles in width and 170 miles in length. In the affected area, trees were badly damaged, wires broken, and thousands of electric poles went down. Electric services were paralyzed, and it required weeks to restore operation and months to permanently rebuild the lines.

The street railway company and the Illinois Traction System resumed complete operation 17 days after the storm. Electric light service was completely restored January 10. The ice had practically disappeared from the trees and wires by January 4, but on January 20, there was still considerable ice on the ground.

The Western Union Telegraph Co. lost 8,000 poles and the Illinois Bell Telephone Co. about 23,000. The total damage to wire service in Illinois probably equaled or exceeded \$5,000,000." If the loss of business, the damage to trees and possible injury to winter grains, the storm may be considered one of the most disastrous of its kind in the history of Illinois."

1929 — An icestorm in western New York State resulted in much damage and hardship. A Buffalo report stated, "one was kept awake by the breaking limbs, which snapped off with a report much louder than a rifle shot." (17th-18th) (The Weather Channel)

2002 — Thunderstorms preceding a strong cold front pushed into the U.S. Mississippi Valley, producing severe weather and tornadoes. Three people were killed in Missouri and Arkansas with more than 40 injuries (Associated Press).

2008 — A winter storm dumped as much as 3.6 inches of snow across Las Vegas, Nevada, prompting the closure of schools and highways. This was the largest December snowfall on record and the heaviest snowfall since January 1979 when a total of 7.5 inches fell (Associated Press).

Recognizing God's Open Doors

Sometimes God uses trials to shape our character and strengthen our faith..

Acts 16:13-34: 13 On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. 14 One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. 15 When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us.

Paul and Silas in Prison

16 Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a female slave who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. 17 She followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved." 18 She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so annoyed that he turned around and said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!" At that moment the spirit left her.

19 When her owners realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. 20 They brought them before the magistrates and said, "These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar 21 by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice."

22 The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten with rods. 23 After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. 24 When he received these orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

25 About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. 26 Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone's chains came loose. 27 The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. 28 But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!"

29 The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. 30 He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

31 They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household." 32 Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. 33 At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptized. 34 The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole household.

We all need the encouragement, comfort, and peace that comes through God's grace. Our daily devotionals, known as Seeds of Hope, have been a means through which thousands of people have experienced this grace. Each devotional comes from God's Word and we pray this good "seed" finds good soil in your heart. Our aim is that the Seeds of Hope will be a great source of daily encouragement to you and that God will use them to draw you near to Him

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One way we tend to judge whether we're walking in God's will is by the outcome. The assumption is that when we're doing what the Lord wants, life will run smoothly. But if all sorts of problems occur, we often assume we have wandered away from His will.

Paul's writings, however, show this is not always the case. His first letter to the Corinthians says, "For a wide door for effective service has opened to me, and there are many adversaries" (1 Corinthians 16:9). That's exactly what happened when God closed one door and opened another on the apostle's second missionary journey (Acts 16:6-10). After Lydia and her household received the gospel, this new opportunity must have seemed hopeful. Yet, a short time later Paul and Silas, having been stripped and beaten with rods, found themselves sitting in a Philippian jail.

We don't like to think God's will for our life might include pain or suffering, but Scripture teaches us that is a possibility. The Lord uses affliction to test our faith, teach dependence on Him, develop godly character, and equip us to comfort others (Romans 5:3-4; 2 Corinthians 1:4).

When the Lord opens a door to trials in our life, it's an opportunity for others to witness God at work in us. May we learn to respond in a manner that draws others to the Savior.

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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:

12.16.25

20 24 46 59 65 7

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$90,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 24 Mins 54 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:

12.15.25

8 11 29 36 50 7

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$9,750,000

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 39 Mins 54 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:

12.16.25

3 4 19 24 39 11

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 54 Mins 54 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:

12.13.25

2 11 20 23 25

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$127,000

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 54 Mins 54 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

12.15.25

20 23 38 42 65 19

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 23 Mins 54 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:

12.15.25

23 35 59 63 68 2

Power Play: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$1,250,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 23 Mins 54 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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News from the **AP** Associated Press

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL

Aberdeen Christian 68, Warner 49
Baltic 67, Parker/Marion 56
Belfield, N.D. 74, Harding County 66
Castlewood 54, Elkton-Lake Benton 48
Chamberlain 60, Gregory 42
Chester 49, Howard 46
Corsica/Stickney 50, Avon 47
Dakota Valley 86, Beresford 66
DeSmet 71, Wessington Springs 53
Deubrook 60, Deuel 27
Estelline-Hendricks 65, Langford 33
Ethan 66, Andes Central/Dakota Christian 41
Faulkton 56, Sunshine Bible Academy 23
Florence-Henry 50, Waverly-South Shore 42
Garretson 69, Canton 53
Gettysburg 70, Miller 66
Groton 66, Sisseton 33
Hamlin 62, Flandreau 47
Huron 66, Brookings 50
Ipswich 53, North Central 44
Lemmon High School 49, Philip 40
Leola-Frederick High School 65, Oakes, N.D. 54
North Central, Neb. 67, Burke 58
Platte-Geddes 67, Kimball-White Lake 22
Sanborn Central-Woonsocket 56, Hitchcock-Tulare 46
Scotland/Menno 52, Bon Homme 49
Sioux Falls Lincoln 66, Harrisburg 53
Sioux Falls Lutheran 60, Oldham-Ramona-Rutland 43
Sioux Falls Washington 54, Yankton 42
Stanley County 52, Winner 50
Sturgis Brown High School 77, Lead-Deadwood 55
Viborg-Hurley 50, Bridgewater-Emery 44
Wagner 62, Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 46
Waubay/Summit 56, Webster 38
Wausa, Neb. 53, Gayville-Volin High School 36
West Central 46, Vermillion 36
Wolsey-Wessington 52, Iroquois-Lake Preston 50

Some high school basketball scores provided by Scorestream.com, <https://scorestream.com/>

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL

Baltic 62, Parker/Marion 40
Bon Homme 37, Scotland/Menno 32
Brandon Valley 73, Sioux Falls Jefferson 44
Bridgewater-Emery 36, Viborg-Hurley 33

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Burke 46, North Central, Neb. 29
Canton 40, Garretson 25
Castlewood 61, Elkton-Lake Benton 31
Chester 55, Howard 42
Colman-Egan 66, Canistota 14
Corsica/Stickney 51, Avon 16
Dakota Valley 69, Beresford 62
Deubrook 61, Deuel 15
Ethan 72, Andes Central/Dakota Christian 25
Faulkton 48, Sunshine Bible Academy 9
Gayville-Volin High School 61, Wausa, Neb. 32
Groton 40, Sisseton 36
Hamlin 63, Flandreau 37
Harding County 82, New England, N.D. 23
Harrisburg 50, Sioux Falls Lincoln 17
Herried-Selby 58, Timber Lake 52
Huron 65, Brookings 50
Ipswich 53, North Central 44
Langford 48, Estelline-Hendricks 47
Lemmon High School 55, Hettinger-Scranton, N.D. 18
Lennox 74, Dell Rapids 56
Lyman 68, Sully Buttes 13
McCook Central-Montrose 42, Freeman 40
McIntosh High School 31, Faith 25
Miller 49, Gettysburg 37
Mitchell 49, Watertown 39
Oldham-Ramona-Rutland 62, Sioux Falls Lutheran 39
Parkston 55, Tripp-Delmont-Armour 26
Philip 65, Belle Fourche 51
Platte-Geddes 37, Kimball-White Lake 25
Sioux Falls Washington 57, Yankton 24
Sturgis Brown High School 67, Lead-Deadwood 27
Tri-Valley 57, Madison 47
Wagner 47, Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 18
Warner 60, Aberdeen Christian 25
Wessington Springs 49, DeSmet 36
West Central 52, Vermillion 49
Winner 59, Stanley County 45
Wyndmere-Lidgerwood, N.D. 63, Wilmot 35

Some high school basketball scores provided by Scorestream.com, <https://scorestream.com/>

Louvre workers vote to extend a strike as the museum partially reopens

By THOMAS ADAMSON and SYLVIE CORBET Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — Employees at the Louvre Museum voted to extend a strike that has disrupted operations at the world's most visited museum, though the attraction partially opened Wednesday to allow visitors to enjoy the "Mona Lisa" and other highlights.

The museum said that visitors have started entering the building, where they had access to a limited

“masterpiece route” which includes Leonardo da Vinci’s “Mona Lisa” and the famous Venus de Milo.

“Due to a strike, some rooms in the Louvre Museum are ... closed,” it said on social media. “We apologize for any inconvenience.”

Union workers are protesting chronic understaffing, building deterioration and recent management decisions — pressures intensified by a brazen crown jewels heist in October.

The decision came during a morning general assembly, after workers had adopted the walkout unanimously earlier this week. The museum was shuttered Tuesday for its weekly closed day.

Tensions have been further sharpened by fallout from the theft of crown jewels during a daylight robbery that exposed serious security lapses at the museum.

Culture Ministry officials held crisis talks with unions Monday and proposed to cancel a planned \$6.7 million cut in 2026 funding, open new recruitment for gallery guards and visitor services and increase staff compensation. Union officials said the measures fell short.

Louvre President Laurence des Cars was scheduled to appear before the Senate’s culture committee later Wednesday as lawmakers continue probing security failures at the museum.

Des Cars has acknowledged an “institutional failure” following the heist but has come under renewed scrutiny after admitting she only learned of a critical 2019 security audit after the robbery. France’s Court of Auditors and a separate administrative inquiry have since criticized delays in implementing a long-promised security overhaul.

The Culture Ministry announced emergency anti-intrusion measures last month and assigned Philippe Jost, who oversaw the Notre Dame restoration, to help reorganize the museum. The move was widely seen as a sign of mounting pressure on Louvre leadership.

Church altar featuring homeless man goes on display a stone’s throw from his grave at the Vatican

By GEIR MOULSON, KERSTIN SOPKE and NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — In 2018, German artist Michael Triegel asked a homeless man in Rome to pose for a drawing, thinking that he would make an ideal model for St. Peter if he ever needed to paint the first pope.

Seven years on, the man’s likeness has gone on display in the Vatican, a reunion of sorts that came about by improbable chance.

This is a story both big and small, of art and faith and a human tragedy that caught the attention of Pope Francis: homeless German man Burkhard Scheffler died from the cold in 2022 on the edge of St. Peter’s Square.

A commission in Germany

The saga began in Germany, where Triegel in 2019 won a commission from the Protestant cathedral in the city of Naumburg to create a new central panel for its altar by Renaissance master Lucas Cranach the Elder. The panel would replace an original that was destroyed in 1541 during the Reformation, the upheavals that convulsed parts of Europe as Protestantism emerged in the 16th century.

Cranach’s two side panels survived. Triegel, a Catholic convert, leapt at the prospect of a “collaboration with Cranach.”

“They had the idea of completing this altar again, in what I find a beautiful gesture — not to undo these wounds from the 16th century but to mitigate them, to heal them,” he said in an interview in his studio in Leipzig.

St. Peter finds his place

Triegel planned out his painting and drew on that encounter he had in 2018 with the homeless man in Rome.

The man took his place as St. Peter among the saints gathered around Mary and the infant Jesus. Triegel said it was important that his subjects not be idealized archetypes but figures the viewer would feel were people “who could have something to do with me in the here and now, who are not just historic.”

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St. Paul was based on a rabbi Triegel drew in Jerusalem, while Mary was modeled on the artist's daughter. In the back was Protestant pastor and theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, an opponent of the Nazis who was executed in 1945.

Triegel's St. Peter is bearded, wears a red baseball cap and holds a small key — a reference to the biblical keys of heaven that are often associated with the saint.

The artist found his saint sitting at the entrance of a Roman church begging. As he was about to give the man money, Triegel recalled, "he looked at me and at that moment I had the feeling, if you ever need a Peter for a picture, he would be your Peter — that flowing beard and those alert eyes."

Triegel asked the man in Italian whether he could draw and photograph him, and the man just nodded — "so I had no idea what nation he was from."

A tragedy in Rome

Unbeknownst to Triegel, his St. Peter had a rough time after their 2018 encounter.

The man, Burkhard Scheffler, had suffered during the COVID-19 pandemic. Under Italy's harsh lockdowns, fewer and fewer people ventured out to provide handouts and food to those in need.

Scheffler was arrested in May 2020 after he apparently threatened someone with a knife for refusing to give him change. He was sentenced to three years in prison and released in late 2022.

Known to many in the Vatican, Scheffler had grown weak in prison. "His hands, which were always warm, had grown cold," a Vatican journalist, Gudrun Sailer, would later recall.

On the night of Nov. 25, 2022, Scheffler died from the cold.

The pope honors the homeless

His death caught the attention of Francis, who had made a priority of caring for the homeless people around the Vatican. Under Francis' watch, the Vatican installed showers, a barber shop and clinic in the colonnade of St. Peter's. Francis' almsgiver went out on cold nights to distribute sleeping bags.

Hours after Scheffler died, the Vatican spokesperson issued a statement saying he had been cared for by the Vatican's charity office but "unfortunately, the rain and cold last night contributed to aggravate his fragile condition." The spokesperson said Francis remembered in his prayer that day "Burkhard and all those who are forced to live without a home, in Rome and the world."

Shortly after, Francis said in his weekly Sunday prayer: "I remember Burkhard Scheffler, who died three days ago under the colonnade of St. Peter's Square: died of cold."

And the pope returned to the theme in his Palm Sunday homily in April 2023. "I think of the German so-called street person, who died under the colonnade, alone and abandoned. He is Jesus for each of us. So many need our closeness, so many are abandoned."

Francis asked that Scheffler be buried at the Teutonic cemetery on the grounds of the Vatican, alongside many German-speaking priests, pilgrims and notables. His simple tomb is in the small pilgrim section, in the shadow of St. Peter's Basilica and just a few yards from the tomb of the real St. Peter.

A dispute over the altar

Back in Germany, Triegel spent three years working on the altar for the Naumburg Cathedral, but a problem arose.

There were concerns that the Triegel-Cranach altar could cost the building its place on the UNESCO World Heritage List. UNESCO experts felt that it hindered the overall view of the west chapel, including famous statues. In July, regional authorities said the verdict was that the altar could stay — but would have to be shown elsewhere in the cathedral.

While that discussion played out, the idea arose of lending the altar to the Catholic chapel of the Teutonic pontifical college at the Vatican, a residence for German-speaking priests adjacent to the cemetery. The chapel has an altar of its own from the period of Cranach's original.

Putting the pieces together

And it was then in the Teutonic chapel that a Vatican-affiliated art expert recognized Triegel's St. Peter as none other than Scheffler.

"Someone said, 'This guy with the red cap, we know him because he was living here at St. Peter's

Square," said Monsignor Peter Klasvogt, rector of the Campo Santo Teutonico, as the complex is known. "That was a moment you never forget."

The altar is now on a two-year loan to the chapel, a stone's throw from Scheffler's grave, itself just steps from the tomb of St. Peter.

When Triegel learned that his altar might end up next to Scheffler's grave, he recalled thinking, "there can't be so many coincidences."

With the arrival of the painting, "the story gets another outcome and another exit, and this is so wonderful to see," Klasvogt said. "We honor him with the altar, we honor him with his grave and we pray here in the church for him."

After the argument about the altar's placement in Germany, the coincidence also appeals to the artist.

"If this whole dispute was necessary for this picture to go to Rome and for this man to be seen again, for him to get a name, for ... people to take notice of him and remember him, then this whole Naumburg project was really worth it for me," Triegel said.

Jack Smith set for private interview with lawmakers about Trump investigations

By ERIC TUCKER and LISA MASCARO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Former Justice Department special counsel Jack Smith is set for a closed-door interview with House Republicans on Wednesday after lawmakers rebuffed his offer to testify publicly about his investigations into President Donald Trump.

The private deposition is part of an ongoing investigation by the Republican-led House Judiciary Committee into the Justice Department's criminal inquiries of Trump during the Biden administration. Smith was subpoenaed earlier this month to provide both testimony and documents, and his lawyers indicated that he would cooperate with the congressional demand despite having volunteered more than a month earlier to answer questions publicly before the committee.

"We are disappointed that offer was rejected, and that the American people will be denied the opportunity to hear directly from Jack on these topics," one of his lawyers, Peter Koski, said in a statement this month. "Jack looks forward to meeting with the committee later this month to discuss his work and clarify the various misconceptions about his investigation."

Trump told reporters at the White House that he supported the idea of an open hearing, saying: "I'd rather see him testify publicly. There's no way he can answer the questions."

Smith is expected to discuss both of his investigations of Trump but will not answer questions that call for grand jury materials, which are restricted by law, according to a person familiar with the investigation who insisted on anonymity to discuss the interview. He is also expected to correct what he regards as mischaracterizations from Republicans about his work, including about his team's use of cellphone records belonging to certain GOP lawmakers, the person said.

Smith was appointed in 2022 to oversee the Justice Department investigations into Trump's efforts to overturn his 2020 presidential election loss and his hoarding of classified documents at his Mar-a-Lago estate in Palm Beach, Florida. Smith's team filed charges in both investigations.

Smith abandoned the cases after Trump was elected to the White House again last year, citing Justice Department legal opinions that say a sitting president cannot be indicted.

Republicans who control Congress have sought interviews with at least some individual members of Smith's team.

In recent weeks they have seized on revelations that the team, as part of its investigation, had analyzed the phone records of select GOP lawmakers from on and around Jan. 6, 2021, when pro-Trump rioters stormed the U.S. Capitol to try to halt the certification of Trump's election loss to Democrat Joe Biden. The phone records reviewed by prosecutors included details only about the incoming and outgoing phone numbers and the length of the call but not the contents of the conversation.

Accused gunman in Bondi Beach shooting charged with 15 counts of murder

By CHARLOTTE GRAHAM-McLAY, KRISTEN GELINEAU AND ROD McGUIRK Associated Press

SYDNEY (AP) — An accused gunman in Sydney's Bondi Beach massacre was charged with 59 offenses including 15 charges of murder on Wednesday, as hundreds of mourners gathered in Sydney to begin funerals for the victims.

Two shooters slaughtered 15 people on Sunday in an antisemitic mass shooting targeting Jews celebrating Hanukkah at Bondi Beach, and more than 20 other people are still being treated in hospitals. All of those killed by the gunmen who have been identified so far were Jewish.

As investigations unfold, Australia faces a social and political reckoning about antisemitism, gun control and whether police protections for Jews at events such as Sunday's were sufficient for the threats they faced.

Accused shooter charged in hospital

Naveed Akram, the 24-year-old alleged shooter, was charged on Wednesday after waking from a coma in a Sydney hospital, where he has been since police shot him and his father at Bondi. His father Sajid Akram, 50, died at the scene.

The charges include one count of murder for each fatality and one count of committing a terrorist act, police said.

Akram was also charged with 40 counts of causing harm with intent to murder in relation to the wounded and with placing an explosive near a building with intent to cause harm.

Police said the Akrams' car, which was found at the crime scene, contained improvised explosive devices.

Akram's lawyer did not enter pleas and did not request his client's release on bail during a video court appearance from his hospital bed, a court statement said.

Akram is being represented by Legal Aid NSW, which has a policy of refusing media comment on behalf of clients. He is expected to remain under police guard in hospital until he is well enough to be transferred to a prison.

A father of 5 who ministered in prisons is buried

Families from Sydney's close-knit Jewish community gathered, one after another, to begin to bury their dead. The victims of the attack ranged in age from a 10-year-old girl to an 87-year-old Holocaust survivor.

Jews are usually buried within 24 hours from their deaths, but funerals have been delayed by coroner's investigations.

The first farewelled was Eli Schlanger, 41, a husband and father of five who served as the assistant rabbi at Chabad-Lubavitch of Bondi and organized Sunday's Chanukah by the Sea event where the attack unfolded. The London-born Schlanger also served as chaplain in prisons across New South Wales state and in a Sydney hospital.

"After what happened, my biggest regret was — apart from, obviously, the obvious — I could have done more to tell Eli more often how much we love him, how much I love him, how much we appreciate everything that he does and how proud we are of him," said Schlanger's father-in-law, Rabbi Yehoram Ulman, who sometimes spoke through tears.

"I hope he knew that. I'm sure he knew it," Ulman said. "But I think it should've been said more often."

One mourner, Dmitry Chlafma, said as he left the service that Schlanger was his longtime rabbi.

"You can tell by the amount of people that are here how much he meant to the community," Chlafma said. "He was warm, happy, generous, one of a kind."

Outside the funeral, not far from the site of the attack, the mood was hushed and grim, with a heavy police presence.

Authorities are probing a suspected connection to the Islamic State group

Authorities believe that the shooting was "a terrorist attack inspired by Islamic State," Australia's federal police commissioner Krissy Barrett said Wednesday.

The Islamic State group is a scattered and considerably weaker group since a 2019 U.S.-led military intervention drove it out of territory it had seized in Iraq and Syria, but its cells remain active and it has

inspired a number of independent attacks including in western countries.

Authorities are also examining a trip the suspects made to the Philippines in November.

Groups of Muslim separatist militants, including Abu Sayyaf in the southern Philippines, once expressed support for IS and have hosted small numbers of foreign militants from Asia, the Middle East and Europe in the past. Philippine military and police officials say there has been no recent indication of any foreign militants in the country's south.

Leader pledges action on guns and antisemitism

The news that the suspects were apparently inspired by the Islamic State group provoked more questions about whether Australia's government had done enough to stem hate-fueled crimes, especially directed at Jews. In Sydney and Melbourne, where 85% of Australia's Jewish population lives, a wave of antisemitic attacks has been recorded in the past year.

After Jewish leaders and survivors of Sunday's attack lambasted the government for not heeding their warnings of violence, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese vowed Wednesday to take whatever government action was needed to stamp out antisemitism.

Albanese and the leaders of some Australian states have pledged to tighten the country's already strict gun laws in what would be the most sweeping reforms since a shooter killed 35 people in Port Arthur, Tasmania, in 1996. Mass shootings in Australia have since been rare.

Albanese has announced plans to further restrict access to guns, in part because it emerged the older suspect had amassed six weapons legally. Proposed measures include restricting gun ownership to Australian citizens and limiting the number of weapons a person can hold.

Australians come together to grieve

Meanwhile, Australians seeking ways to make sense of the horror settled on practical acts. Hours-long lines were reported at blood donation sites and at dawn on Wednesday, hundreds of swimmers formed a circle on the sand, where they held a minute's silence. Then they ran into the sea.

Not far away, part of the beach remained behind police tape as the investigation into the massacre continued, shoes and towels abandoned as people fled still strewn across the sand.

One event that would return to Bondi was the Hanukkah celebration the gunmen targeted, which has run for 31 years, Ulman said. It would be in defiance of the attackers' wish to make people feel like it was dangerous to live as Jews, he added.

"Eli lived and breathed this idea that we can never ever allow them not only to succeed, but anytime that they try something we become greater and stronger," he said.

"We're going to show the world that the Jewish people are unbeatable."

Trafficked, exploited, married off: Rohingya children's lives crushed by foreign aid cuts

By KRISTEN GELINEAU Associated Press

UKHIYA, Bangladesh (AP) — In moments when she is alone, when there is a break in the beatings from her husband, the girl cries for the school that was once her place of peace in a world that has otherwise offered her none.

Ever since the military in her homeland of Myanmar killed her father in 2017, forcing her to flee to neighboring Bangladesh with her mother and little sisters, the school had protected Hasina from the predators who prowl her refugee camp, home to 1.2 million members of Myanmar's persecuted Rohingya minority.

It had also protected her from being forced into marriage. And then one day in June, when Hasina was 16 years old, her teacher announced that the school's funding had been taken away. The school was closing. In a blink, Hasina's education was over, and so, too, was her childhood.

With her learning opportunities gone, and her family worried that foreign aid cuts would make their fight for survival in the camps even more perilous, Hasina — along with hundreds of other girls under the age of 18 — was quickly married off. And, just like Hasina, many of the girls are now trapped in marriages with men who abuse them.

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"I dreamed of being something, of working for the community," Hasina, now 17, says softly. The Associated Press is withholding her full name to protect her from retaliation by her husband. "My life is destroyed."

The sudden and severe foreign aid cuts imposed this year by U.S. President Donald Trump, along with funding reductions from other countries, shuttered thousands of the camps' schools and youth training centers and crippled child protection programs. Beyond unwanted marriages, scores of children as young as 10 were forced into backbreaking manual labor, and girls as young as 12 forced into prostitution. With no safe space to play or learn, children were left to wander the labyrinthine camps, making them increasingly easy targets for kidnappers. And the young and desperate were picked off by traffickers who promised to restore what the children had lost: Hope.

In a sweltering building not far from the cramped shelter where her husband tortures her, Hasina plays nervously with the strap of her pink mobile phone case, emblazoned with the words "Forever Young."

She is still young, she says. But the aid cuts forced her into womanhood and into a nightmare. Not long after marrying her husband, she says, he isolated her from her family and began to beat and sexually abuse her. She daydreams daily of school, where she was a whiz at English and hoped to become a teacher. Now, she is confined largely to her shelter, cooking and cleaning and waiting with dread for the next beating.

If she had any way to escape, she says, she would. But there is nowhere to go. She cannot return to Myanmar, where the military that killed thousands of Rohingya in 2017 during what the U.S. declared a genocide remains in charge of her homeland.

Now, her husband is in charge of her future, though she no longer sees one.

"If the school hadn't closed," she says, "I wouldn't be trapped in this life."

Children targeted

Life has always been dangerous for the 600,000 children languishing in these chaotic, overcrowded camps, where a squalid jumble of bamboo and tarpaulin shelters are jammed onto landslide-prone hills. But Trump's decision in January to dismantle the U.S. Agency for International Development has made it even more so, the AP found in interviews with 37 children, family members, teachers, community leaders and aid workers.

Violations against children in the camps have risen sharply this year, according to UNICEF, the United Nations' children's agency. Between January and mid-November, reported cases of abduction and kidnapping more than quadrupled over the same time period last year, to 560 children. And there has been an eightfold increase in reports of armed groups' recruitment and use of children for training and support roles in the camps, with 817 children affected. Many members of the armed groups are battling a powerful ethnic militia across the border in Myanmar. The actual number of cases is likely higher due to under-reporting, according to UNICEF, which lost 27% of its funding due to the U.S. aid cuts and subsequently shuttered nearly 2,800 schools.

"The armed groups, with their roots in Myanmar, are operating in the camps, using the camps as a fertile ground for recruiting young people," says Patrick Halton, a child protection manager for UNICEF. "Obviously, if children are not in learning centers and not in multipurpose centers, then they're more vulnerable to this."

Verified cases of child marriage, which the U.N. defines as the union of children under age 18, rose by 21% and verified child labor cases by 17% in the year to September, compared to the same time period last year. Those statistics are likely to be a significant undercount, says Halton.

"With the funding cuts, we had to downscale a lot in terms of the education," Halton says. "It's meant that children have not necessarily had things to do, and we've therefore seen this rise in children being married, children being in child labor."

Though the U.S. spent just 1% of its budget on foreign aid, Trump dubbed USAID wasteful and shut it down, a move that has proven catastrophic for the world's most vulnerable. In Myanmar, the AP found the aid cuts have caused children to starve to death, despite U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio's statement to Congress that "No one has died" because of the dissolution of USAID. A study published in The Lancet journal in June said the U.S. funding cuts could result in more than 14 million deaths, including more than 4.5 million children under age 5, by 2030.

In the Bangladesh camps, the U.S. — which has long been the biggest provider of aid to the predomi-

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nantly Muslim Rohingya — slashed its funding by nearly half compared to last year. The overall Rohingya emergency response is only 50% funded for 2025, and aid agencies say next year is expected to be far worse.

In a statement to the AP, the State Department said the U.S. has provided more than \$168 million to the Rohingya since the beginning of Trump's term, although data from the U.N.'s financial tracking service show the U.S. contribution in 2025 is \$156 million. Asked about the disparity, the State Department said the U.N.'s financial tracking service had not been recently updated and "generally does not show the latest information on all U.S. funding."

The department said it had "advanced burden sharing and improved efficiency" in the Rohingya response, resulting in 11 countries increasing their funding by more than 10% year on year, collectively contributing \$72 million.

"The Trump Administration continues to pursue the diplomatic efforts to encourage additional countries to help shoulder the burden," the statement said.

The department didn't respond to the AP's request for evidence that the U.S. had influenced other countries' funding decisions for the Rohingya response.

When the schools shut down, hundreds of underage girls — some as young as 14 — were married off, says Showkutara, executive director of the Rohingya Women Association for Education and Development. Her network of contacts across the camps have also reported an increase in kidnapping and trafficking, as well as a huge surge in the prostitution of girls as young as 12 since the aid cuts.

"After the school closures, they had no space to play. ... That's why they're playing on the roads, far away from their blocks," says Showkutara, who goes by one name. "There are some groups who are targeting the children."

While UNICEF managed to repurpose some of its remaining funding, enabling the agency to recently reopen most of its learning centers, scores of schools run by other aid groups are still shut, and thousands of children remain out of class. And aid workers are anticipating even steeper funding cuts next year, leaving the schools' futures uncertain. Save the Children has only secured a third of its funding target for life-saving services for 2026, meaning 20,000 children attending its schools are at risk of losing their education starting in January, says Golam Mostofa, the group's area director for Cox's Bazar, the closest city to the camps.

Meanwhile, Showkutara says, the children locked out of learning by the initial closures are forever lost: Both metaphorically, in the case of girls like Hasina who were married off to men who will never let them return to school even if they reopen, and literally, in the case of children who vanished into the trafficking network.

"It's too late," she says.

The death of dreams

The little boy sits slumped on a plastic stool under the punishing sun, his cheeks streaked with sweat, a cooler of freeze pops and other treats at his dirty feet. Ever since 10-year-old Mohammed Arfan's school closed, this is where he spends 10 hours a day, seven days a week, selling snacks and daydreaming of the small schoolroom where he once felt safe and loved.

He had just finished his math lessons the day that his teacher told him the school's funding was gone. As he walked home, he and his friends began to cry.

"I thought that I would not see my friends anymore, and that I was losing my future," he says.

With no lessons to occupy his time, and his parents worried about their seven children's survival, Arfan's mother told him he would need to work to help keep the family fed.

He was terrified. If the camp's kidnappers or thieves targeted him while he was working, he knew he was too small to fight back.

But he had no choice, and so his daily drudgery began. Each morning, he wakes at 7 and walks for half an hour to the factory to pick up the treats. Then, hoisting the 15-kilogram (30-pound) cooler upon his bony shoulder, he walks another 30 minutes to the corner of the dusty road where he sets up shop

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among the garbage, rotting banana peels and swarms of flies. For his efforts, he takes home around 200 to 300 taka (\$1.60 to \$2.50) a day.

There are boys like Arfan all over the camps, selling food they're desperate to eat and collecting trash in exchange for cash, shoulders slumped with exhaustion, skin seared by the sun.

In a drainage ditch next to a row of stinking latrines, 13-year-old Rahamot Ullah wades up to his waist in water clouded with raw sewage, plucking from the muck discarded pieces of plastic. Five hours of rummaging through the waste will generally net him enough plastic to trade for around 50 taka (40 cents).

His eye blazes with blood from the bamboo that pierced it 10 days earlier while slogging through the sewage. He began coming here soon after his school shut down, in the hopes he could collect enough trash to pay the 500 taka (\$4) a month fee for private lessons. Many months, that fee has remained out of reach.

He worries he will drown in the ditch. And he worries that his dreams of becoming a camp official or a teacher will never come true.

Back on the street corner, Arfan, too, feels his dreams dying. He shouldn't be here, he says, voice barely audible above the incessant shrieking of horns from the rickshaws racing past, just inches from his cooler.

"I feel shame working," he says. "This is the time I should be studying."

Each night when the sun sets, Arfan packs up and heads back to his shelter. And it is here where he lies on a mat on the bamboo floor, crying himself to sleep and pining for the life he was forced to leave behind.

'My heart is still crying'

The laughter that once filled Noor Zia's classroom has been replaced by tears. Nearly every day, she says, her former students stop by to see if the school has reopened, only to break down when told it has not.

Zia often finds herself in tears, too. Before the aid cuts, she was the head teacher of 21 early learning centers that served 630 children aged 3-5. But the closures left her without a job, making it even harder for her to keep her family alive on the camp's meager rations.

"My heart is still crying, because my family depends on this job," she says, sitting in the empty classroom, where the wall behind her is adorned with a drawing of the Myanmar flag — a country most of her students, born in the camps, have never seen.

The funding cuts' pain goes beyond the school closures. Skills development programs that kept thousands of children occupied were also halted. Healthcare, nutrition and sanitation services have been reduced. In camps crawling with scabies and other diseases, the results of the reductions are clear on the children's scrawny bodies. Lesions line their slender limbs. The wet, rattling coughs of babies fill the fetid air. Atop a muddy hill, clusters of kids scratch ferociously at their heads, while a 4-year-old stoically plucks nits from her friend's scalp.

Bangladesh has barred the Rohingya from leaving the camps to find work, so they are reliant upon humanitarian aid to survive. But the U.N.'s World Food Program, which had counted the U.S. as its largest donor, says it only has enough funds to continue providing food rations through March.

The prospect of a ration cut has terrified families. With no country offering the Rohingya large-scale resettlement, many have opted to make a run for it, with devastating results. Nearly a third of the 1,340 Rohingya who have fled Bangladesh by boat this year have died or gone missing en route, according to the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees.

Noor Kaida, a 17-year-old whose dreams of becoming a doctor were dashed when she was married off after her school shut, says she has lost two young relatives to traffickers. Shattered by the school closures, the 13- and 16-year-old girls believed traffickers who promised them a better life in Malaysia, Kaida says. Other passengers on the girls' boats later told Kaida's family both girls were killed; one by drowning, and the other at the hands of a trafficker.

"If the school wasn't closed, they wouldn't have had to take these risks," Kaida says. "Because of the funding cuts and the school closures, thousands of girls were scattered in different places and their lives have been ruined."

'Pray for me'

The 13-year-old boy had been missing for nine days when the call came in from an unfamiliar number.

"Baba, I'm leaving," Mohammed told his frantic father. "I'm on the big boat now. Pray for me."

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The call disconnected, and Mohib Ullah knew his worst nightmare had come true: Just like so many other children in recent months, his boy had been taken by traffickers. Ullah — who has no relation to Rahamot Ullah — called back again and again, but the phone was switched off.

Mohammed — whose full name the AP is withholding for safety reasons — had been miserable since his school closed. The kindhearted boy who loved to read and learn, especially English, had long dreamed of becoming a teacher. When his education ended, he told his father through tears that his life was over. Ullah promised to try and find money for private school, but as a widower caring for four children, it was impossible.

The teen hatched a plan, which he shared in secret with his big sister, Bibi: He would go with a trafficker to Malaysia, and find a future there. Bibi tried to talk him out of it; traffickers who take children on the long, dangerous journey generally detain the youngsters at the end until their parents pay a fee for their release. The children of parents who can't pay are often tortured, and sometimes killed. Bibi warned her brother that their father would never be able to afford the trafficker's payment.

But Mohammed didn't care. "It's better to withstand two years of torture than stay here in a hopeless camp," he told his sister. "It's better to die if I can't continue learning."

In a panic, Bibi shared her brother's plan with their father, who was horrified; he knew how deadly the journey to Malaysia can be. He ordered his son to stay put, and to stay patient. The schools will reopen someday, he assured Mohammed. But the teen was convinced they would not.

And so, one morning in October, Mohammed left his family's shelter and never returned. Ullah scoured the camps and called relatives, searching for any trace of his son. He couldn't sleep, couldn't eat. He has already lost another son, an 8-year-old who suddenly died on the anniversary of Ullah's wife's death, after crying all day about missing his mother and then saying he felt unwell. The prospect of losing one more child was unbearable.

Mohammed's call came on Oct. 21. And then, for over six weeks, there was silence.

On Dec. 6, Ullah's phone finally rang. It was Mohammed — still alive, but sick and sobbing. The traffickers were demanding 380,000 taka (\$3,100) for his release — an astronomical sum that Ullah told Mohammed he did not have. But the terrified boy begged his father to try and find it.

Ullah knew if couldn't, his son would likely be killed. And so he pleaded with anyone he could think of for any money they could spare. In the end, he collected just enough, and Mohammed was set free in Malaysia.

Ullah does not know what will become of his boy, who is still so young and wandering around a country that is alien to him.

"If he could have continued his studies, he could have been a teacher, he could have stayed near me," Ullah says, blinking back tears. "Now he's left me and I can't see him. So I lost my dream, too."

His voice cracks as he describes what was long one of his greatest joys: The sight of his son coming home from school, backpack slung across his shoulders.

Now, the stacks of workbooks Mohammed once pored over sit in his bedroom, untouched. His brown sandals are propped against the wall, alongside the sparkly pink sneakers belonging to the sister who tried in vain to stop him.

And, hanging from a piece of bamboo, gathering dust, is his backpack.

FCC leader Brendan Carr to face Senate questioning for first time since Kimmel controversy

By JOEY CAPPELLETTI and MATT SEDENSKY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Federal Communications Commission Chairman Brendan Carr will face Senate questioning Wednesday for the first time since he pressured broadcasters to take ABC late-night host Jimmy Kimmel off the air, a stance that drew bipartisan criticism and raised concerns about government interference in the media.

Carr will appear before the Senate Commerce committee for an oversight hearing that will also include

the FCC's two other commissioners, Olivia Trusty and Anna M. Gomez. It will be the first Senate Commerce oversight hearing with all FCC commissioners since 2020, though there are two vacancies on the five-member panel.

Since being tapped by President Donald Trump last November to lead the nation's top broadcast regulator, Carr has closely aligned with the administration's aggressive posture toward media outlets it views as hostile. He has launched FCC investigations into ABC, CBS and NBC News, in addition to some local stations.

Trump in his second term has sued The Wall Street Journal, The New York Times and, most recently, the BBC. And at Trump's urging, Congress this summer approved eliminating \$1.1 billion allocated to public broadcasting.

Earlier this year, Carr came under fire from lawmakers in both parties after he denounced Kimmel's comments about the assassination of conservative activist Charlie Kirk. He called Kimmel's remarks "truly sick" and warned broadcasters, "We can do this the easy way or the hard way." Hours later, ABC announced Kimmel had been suspended indefinitely.

Senate Commerce Committee Chairman Ted Cruz, who scheduled the hearing last month, was among the Republicans who criticized Carr's remarks at the time.

"I think it is unbelievably dangerous for government to put itself in the position of saying we're going to decide what speech we like and what we don't, and we're going to threaten to take you off air if we don't like what you're saying," Cruz said on his podcast, calling Carr's comments "dangerous as hell."

The hearing comes as Carr faces additional scrutiny from Democrats over media consolidation. Democratic Sen. Jacky Rosen, a member of the committee, joined other Democrats this week in urging Carr to closely examine Nexstar Media Group's proposed acquisition of rival broadcaster Tegna.

In a letter sent Tuesday, the lawmakers warned the deal would further concentrate media power in the U.S. local television market.

"Regulatory approval of the conglomerate would likely raise prices for consumers, accelerate job losses, and weaken the independence and news coverage of local TV stations," they wrote.

The transaction would require the FCC to loosen rules limiting how many stations a single company may own. Carr has said he is open to changing those ownership limits. Nexstar was one of two ABC affiliate owners that said they would preempt Kimmel's show with local programming following his comments about Kirk.

Kimmel's suspension came after his monologue included a reference to Kirk's shooting and compared Trump's grief to "how a 4-year-old mourns a goldfish." The show returned to air less than a week after the indefinite suspension was announced.

Rob Reiner's son Nick set to appear in court on 2 counts of murder in killing of his parents

By ANDREW DALTON and CHRISTOPHER WEBER Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Rob Reiner's son Nick Reiner is expected to make his first court appearance Wednesday on two counts of first-degree murder in the killing of his parents.

Nick Reiner, 32, was charged Tuesday with killing the 78-year-old actor and director Rob Reiner and his wife, Michele Singer Reiner, Los Angeles County District Attorney Nathan Hochman announced at a news conference with LA Police Chief Jim McDonnell.

"Their loss is beyond tragic and we will commit ourselves to bringing their murderer to justice," Hochman said.

Along with the two counts of first-degree murder, prosecutors added special circumstances of multiple murders and a special allegation that the defendant used a dangerous weapon, a knife. The additions could mean a greater sentence.

Hochman said his office has not yet decided whether to seek the death penalty in the case.

"This case is heartbreaking and deeply personal, not only for the Reiner family and their loved ones but for our entire city," McDonnell said.

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The announcement came two days after the couple was found dead from apparent stab wounds in their home in the upscale Brentwood neighborhood on the west side of Los Angeles. Nick Reiner did not resist when he was arrested hours later in the Exposition Park area near the University of Southern California, about 14 miles (22.5 kilometers) from the crime scene, police said.

Rob Reiner was the Emmy-winning star of the sitcom "All in the Family" who went on to direct films including "When Harry Met Sally..." and "The Princess Bride." He was an outspoken liberal activist for decades. Michele Singer Reiner was a photographer, movie producer and advocate for LGBTQ+ rights. They had been married for 36 years.

Several of those closest to them, including actors Billy Crystal, Albert Brooks, Martin Short and Larry David, released a statement mourning and celebrating the couple on Tuesday night.

"They were a special force together — dynamic, unselfish and inspiring," the statement said. "We were their friends, and we will miss them forever."

Nick Reiner had been scheduled to make an initial court appearance earlier Tuesday, but his attorney Alan Jackson said he was not brought from the jail to the courthouse for medical reasons and the appearance was postponed.

At Wednesday's hearing, Reiner may enter a plea, a judge may schedule an arraignment for later or the same issue that prevented him from coming to court Tuesday could cause further postponement. He is being held without bail.

Jackson is a high-profile defense attorney and former LA County prosecutor who represented Harvey Weinstein at his Los Angeles trial and Karen Read at her intensely followed trials in Massachusetts. He was a central figure in the HBO documentary on the Read case.

On the other side will be Deputy District Attorney Habib Balian, whose recent cases included the Menendez brothers' attempt at resentencing and the trial of Robert Durst.

Authorities haven't said anything about a motive for the killings and would give few details when asked at the news conference.

Investigators release additional video of possible Brown gunman as search continues

By KIMBERLEE KRUESI and LEAH WILLINGHAM Associated Press

PROVIDENCE, R.I. (AP) — Authorities have asked the public for any footage they might have of the gunman who fatally shot two students and wounded nine others at Brown University, even as they released a new video timeline and a slightly clearer image of a possible suspect.

Investigators provided no indication Tuesday that they were any closer to zeroing in on his identity. In all the videos made public, the suspect's face was masked or turned away, and authorities have only been able to give a vague description of him as being stocky and about 5 feet, 8 inches (173 centimeters) tall.

Officers have been canvassing around Providence in search of clues that might help them figure out who was behind Saturday's campus shooting.

Surveillance video the FBI posted online before it was removed showed a person in dark clothing walking along multiple sidewalks for about an hour starting shortly after 2 p.m. Saturday. The streets were all within a few blocks of the Brown University engineering building where the shooting occurred.

Some clips show the person walking in front of some properties several times. In one, the person abruptly turns around and runs in the other direction when someone approaches.

Two clips taken minutes after the shooting show the person walking away from a parking lot and then along a street.

Authorities ask public for help

Police have received about 200 tips, and Col. Oscar Perez, the Providence police chief, asked the public on Tuesday to look at their camera systems in the area to see if they have footage that might help officials identify the suspected gunman.

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"We're looking for a moment that is shorter than someone taking a breath," Perez said.

A lack of cameras and clear video of the gunman has continued to frustrate both authorities and the community. While Brown President Christina Paxson confirmed Tuesday that the campus has 1,200 cameras, law enforcement says there is no clear video of the shooter from inside the engineering building.

Rhode Island Attorney General Peter Neronha defended the investigation as going "really well" as he pleaded for public patience in locating the suspected killer.

Large questions remain, particularly about the shooter's motive. When pressed about a connection to ethnicity, political motive or culture, Neronha said, "That is a dangerous road to go down."

Seeking solace

Brown alumnus Chris Kremer joined about 200 others at a somber church service on campus for the victims Tuesday. He lives a block from the scene and often goes to the building where the shooting happened. Many in the community are thinking how easily they could have been among the shot, he said.

He said it was better to attend the service than to sit alone being sad, depressed and scrolling through his phone.

"It's always nice to be in a big exalted space when you're thinking kind of big heavy thoughts," Kremer said. "I guess people for thousands of years have found that to be something of a salve, so I'm hoping that a little bit of that works for me tonight."

Campus security

The attack and the shooter's escape have raised questions about campus security, including a lack of cameras, and led to calls for better locks on campus doors.

Paxson said the university has two security systems. One system, activated at a time of emergency, sent out text messages, phone calls and emails that reached 20,000 people. The other system features three sirens across the campus and was not activated Saturday, a decision Paxson defended because doing so would have caused people to rush into buildings, including the one where the shooting was happening.

"So that is not a system we would ever use in the case of an active shooter," she said.

Brown's website says the sirens can be used when there is an active shooter, but Paxson said it "depends on the circumstances" and the location of the shooter.

A city on edge

Providence remained tense on Tuesday as additional police were sent to city schools to reassure worried parents that their kids would be safe. Ten state troopers were assigned to support police sent to beef up security at schools, district Superintendent Javier Montañez said.

Providence public schools canceled after-school activities and field trips for the week as a precaution.

Locals expressed fear as well as defiance as the investigation continued Tuesday.

"Of course it feels scary. But at the same time, I think that if the person really wanted to scare us, we shouldn't allow him or her to win," said Tatjana Stojanovic, a Providence parent who lives next door to the Brown campus.

Others say the attention on security measures does little to address the real issue.

"The issue isn't the doors, it's the guns," said Zoe Kass, a senior who fled the engineering building as police stormed in Saturday.

After spending of her life in schools where every door was locked and school shootings continued to persist, Kass said such security measures only created "the illusion of safety."

A fuller picture of the victims emerges

Details have emerged about the victims, who were in the first-floor classroom in the school's engineering building studying for a final.

Two of the wounded students had been released as of Tuesday, Brown spokesperson Amanda McGregor said. Of the seven people that remained hospitalized, Mayor Brett Smiley said one remained in critical condition, five were in critical but stable condition and one was in stable condition.

One of the wounded students, 18-year-old freshman Spencer Yang of New York City, told The New York Times and the Brown Daily Herald that there was a mad scramble after the gunman entered the room.

Yang said he wound up on the ground between some seats and was shot in the leg.

Jacob Spears, 18, a freshman from Evans, Georgia, was shot in the stomach, "but through sheer adrenaline and courage, he managed to run outside, where he was aided by others," according to a GoFundMe site organized for him.

Ella Cook, a 19-year-old sophomore who was one of the two students killed, was vice president of the Brown College Republicans and was beloved in her church in Birmingham, Alabama.

The other student killed was MukhammadAziz Umurzokov, an 18-year-old freshman from Brandermill, Virginia, who was majoring in biochemistry and neuroscience. His family immigrated to the U.S. from Uzbekistan when he was a kid.

Trump orders blockade of 'sanctioned oil tankers' into Venezuela, ramping up pressure on Maduro

By MICHELLE L. PRICE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump said Tuesday he is ordering a blockade of all "sanctioned oil tankers" into Venezuela, ramping up pressure on the country's authoritarian leader Nicolás Maduro in a move that seemed designed to put a tighter chokehold on the South American country's economy.

Trump's escalation comes after U.S. forces last week seized an oil tanker off Venezuela's coast, an unusual move that followed a buildup of military forces in the region. In a post on social media Tuesday night announcing the blockade, Trump alleged Venezuela was using oil to fund drug trafficking and other crimes and vowed to continue the military buildup until the country gave the U.S. oil, land and assets, though it was not clear why he felt the U.S. had a claim.

"Venezuela is completely surrounded by the largest Armada ever assembled in the History of South America," Trump said in a post on his social media platform. "It will only get bigger, and the shock to them will be like nothing they have ever seen before — Until such time as they return to the United States of America all of the Oil, Land, and other Assets that they previously stole from us."

Pentagon officials referred all questions about the post to the White House.

Venezuela's government released a statement Tuesday accusing Trump of "violating international law, free trade, and the principle of free navigation" with "a reckless and grave threat" against the South American country.

"On his social media, he assumes that Venezuela's oil, land, and mineral wealth are his property," the statement said of Trump's post. "Consequently, he demands that Venezuela immediately hand over all its riches. The President of the United States intends to impose, in an utterly irrational manner, a supposed naval blockade on Venezuela with the aim of stealing the wealth that belongs to our nation."

Maduro's government, according to the statement, plans to denounce the situation before the United Nations.

The U.S. buildup has been accompanied by a series of military strikes on boats in international waters in the Caribbean and eastern Pacific. The campaign, which has drawn bipartisan scrutiny among U.S. lawmakers, has killed at least 95 people in 25 known strikes on vessels.

Trump has for weeks said that the U.S. will move its campaign beyond the water and start strikes on land.

The Trump administration has defended the strikes as a success, saying they have prevented drugs from reaching American shores, and pushed back on concerns that they are stretching the bounds of lawful warfare.

The Trump administration has said the campaign is about stopping drugs headed to the U.S., but Trump's chief of staff Susie Wiles appeared to confirm in a Vanity Fair interview published Tuesday that the campaign is part of a push to oust Maduro.

Wiles said Trump "wants to keep on blowing boats up until Maduro cries uncle."

Tuesday night's announcement seemed to have a similar aim.

Venezuela, which has the world's largest proven oil reserves and produces about 1 million barrels a day, has long relied on oil revenue as a lifeblood of its economy.

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Since the Trump administration began imposing oil sanctions on Venezuela in 2017, Maduro's government has relied on a shadowy fleet of unflagged tankers to smuggle crude into global supply chains.

The state-owned oil company Petróleos de Venezuela S.A., commonly known as PDVSA, has been locked out of global oil markets by U.S. sanctions. It sells most of its exports at a steep discount in the black market in China.

Francisco Monaldi, a Venezuelan oil expert at Rice University in Houston, said about 850,000 barrels of the 1 million daily production is exported. Of that, he said, 80% goes to China, 15% to 17% goes to the U.S. through Chevron Corp., and the remainder goes to Cuba.

In October, Trump appeared to confirm reports that Maduro has offered a stake in Venezuela's oil and other mineral wealth in recent months to try to stave off mounting pressure from the United States.

"He's offered everything," Trump said at the time. "You know why? Because he doesn't want to f--- around with the United States."

It wasn't immediately clear how the U.S. planned to enact what Trump called a "TOTAL AND COMPLETE BLOCKADE OF ALL SANCTIONED OIL TANKERS going into, and out of, Venezuela."

But the U.S. Navy has 11 ships, including an aircraft carrier and several amphibious assault ships, in the region.

Those ships carry a wide complement of aircraft, including helicopters and V-22 Ospreys. Additionally, the Navy has been operating a handful of P-8 Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft in the region.

All told, those assets provide the military a significant ability to monitor marine traffic coming in and out of the country.

Trump in his post said that the "Venezuelan Regime has been designated a FOREIGN TERRORIST ORGANIZATION," but it wasn't clear what he was referring to.

The foreign terrorist organization designation has been historically reserved for non-state actors that do not have sovereign immunities conferred by either treaties or United Nations membership.

In November, the Trump administration announced it was designating the Cartel de los Soles as a foreign terrorist organization. The term Cartel de los Soles originally referred to Venezuelan military officers involved in drug-running, but it is not a cartel per se.

Governments that U.S. administrations seek to sanction for financing, otherwise fomenting or tolerating extremist violence are usually designated "state sponsors of terrorism."

Venezuela is not on that list.

In rare cases, the U.S. has designated an element of a foreign government as an "FTO." The Trump administration in its first term did so with the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, an arm of the Iranian government, which had already been designated a state sponsor of terrorism.

Billy Crystal, Albert Brooks and other close friends of Rob and Michele Reiner pay tribute

By The Associated Press undefined

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Some of Rob and Michele Reiner's closest friends, including actors Billy Crystal, Albert Brooks, Martin Short and Larry David, have released a statement mourning the couple and praising their love of film and country.

"Absorbing all he had learned from his father Carl and his mentor Norman Lear, Rob Reiner not only was a great comic actor, he became a master story teller. There is no other director who has his range. From comedy to drama to 'mockumentary' to documentary he was always at the top of his game. He charmed audiences. They trusted him. They lined up to see his films," the group said in a statement released first to The Associated Press.

"His comedic touch was beyond compare, his love of getting the music of the dialogue just right, and his sharpening of the edge of a drama was simply elegant," it said of Rob Reiner, whose films included "A Few Good Men," "When Harry Met Sally..." and "The Princess Bride."

The statement was released two days after Rob and Michele Reiner were found dead in their home in

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the Brentwood neighborhood of Los Angeles. Their son, Nick Reiner, was charged Tuesday with two counts of murder and is suspected of stabbing his parents to death.

The joint statement came from some of Reiner's longtime collaborators and contemporaries, including Crystal, Brooks, Short, David and their spouses. The signatories included writer Alan Zweibel, composer and lyricist Marc Shaiman, director Barry Levinson and former U.S. Ambassador to Spain James Costos.

"For the actors, he loved them. For the writers he made them better. His greatest gift was freedom. If you had an idea, he listened, he brought you into the process. They always felt they were working as a team. To be in his hands as a film maker was a privilege but that is only part of his legacy," the statement said.

The Reiners were major Democratic contributors and champions of numerous political causes.

"Rob was also a passionate, brave citizen, who not only cared for this country he loved, he did everything he could to make it better and with his loving wife Michele, he had the perfect partner. Strong and determined, Michele and Rob Reiner devoted a great deal of their lives for the betterment of our fellow citizens... They were a special force together — dynamic, unselfish and inspiring," the statement said.

"We were their friends, and we will miss them forever," it said, before concluding with a quote from one of Reiner's favorite films, the Christmastime classic "It's a Wonderful Life."

"Each man's life touches so many other lives, and when he isn't around, he leaves an awful hole, doesn't he?" You have no idea," the statement concludes.

The deaths of the Reiners have stunned Hollywood, especially since their family embodied a gentle and comedic spirit.

Their deaths drew tributes from numerous stars and political figures on Sunday and Monday, but many of those closest to the Reiners had yet to release statements.

Trump expands travel ban and restrictions to include an additional 20 countries

By REBECCA SANTANA Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Trump administration announced Tuesday it was expanding travel restrictions to an additional 20 countries and the Palestinian Authority, doubling the number of nations affected by sweeping limits announced earlier this year on who can travel and emigrate to the U.S.

The Trump administration included five more countries as well as people traveling on documents issued by the Palestinian Authority to the list of countries facing a full ban on travel to the U.S. and imposed new limits on 15 other countries.

The move is part of ongoing efforts by the administration to tighten U.S. entry standards for travel and immigration, in what critics say unfairly prevents travel for people from a broad range of countries. The administration suggested it would expand the restrictions after the arrest of an Afghan national suspect in the shooting of two National Guard troops over Thanksgiving weekend.

People who already have visas, are lawful permanent residents of the U.S. or have certain visa categories such as diplomats or athletes, or whose entry into the country is believed to serve the U.S. interest, are all exempt from the restrictions. The proclamation said the changes go into effect on Jan. 1.

In June, President Donald Trump announced that citizens of 12 countries would be banned from coming to the United States and those from seven others would face restrictions. The decision resurrected a hallmark policy of his first term.

At the time the ban included Afghanistan, Myanmar, Chad, the Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Haiti, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen and heightened restrictions on visitors from Burundi, Cuba, Laos, Sierra Leone, Togo, Turkmenistan and Venezuela.

On Tuesday, the Republican administration announced it was expanding the list of countries whose citizens are banned from entering the U.S. to Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, South Sudan and Syria. The administration also fully restricted travel on people with Palestinian Authority-issued travel documents, the latest U.S. travel restriction against Palestinians. South Sudan was also facing significant travel restrictions already.

An additional 15 countries are also being added to the list of countries facing partial restrictions: Angola,

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Antigua and Barbuda, Benin, Ivory Coast, Dominica, Gabon, Gambia, Malawi, Mauritania, Nigeria, Senegal, Tanzania, Tonga, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

The restrictions apply to both people seeking to travel to the U.S. as visitors or to emigrate there.

The Trump administration said in its announcement that many of the countries from which it was restricting travel had "widespread corruption, fraudulent or unreliable civil documents and criminal records" that made it difficult to vet their citizens for travel to the U.S.

It also said some countries had high rates of people overstaying their visas, refused to take back their citizens whom the U.S. wished to deport or had a "general lack of stability and government control," which made vetting difficult. It also cited immigration enforcement, foreign policy and national security concerns for the move.

The Afghan man accused of shooting the two National Guard troops near the White House has pleaded not guilty to murder and assault charges. In the aftermath of that incident, the administration announced a flurry of immigration restrictions, including further restrictions on people from those initial 19 countries who were already in the U.S.

The news of the expanding travel ban is likely to face fierce opposition from critics who have argued that the administration is using national security concerns to collectively keep out people from a wide range of countries.

"This expanded ban is not about national security but instead is another shameful attempt to demonize people simply for where they are from," said Laurie Ball Cooper, vice president of U.S. Legal Programs at the International Refugee Assistance Project.

Advocates for Afghans who supported the United States' two-decade long war in Afghanistan also raised alarms Tuesday, saying the updated travel ban no longer contains an exception for Afghans who qualify for the Special Immigrant Visa. That's a visa category specifically for Afghans who closely assisted the U.S. war effort at great risk to themselves.

No One Left Behind, a longtime agency advocating for the Special Immigrant Visa program, said it was "deeply concerned" about the change. The organization said it appreciated the president's commitment to national security but allowing Afghans who'd served the U.S. to enter the U.S. — after extensive vetting — also contributes to the country's security.

"Though intended to allow for review of inconsistent vetting processes, this policy change inadvertently restricts those who are among the most rigorously vetted in our history: the wartime allies targeted by the terrorists this proclamation seeks to address," the organization said in a statement.

Countries that were newly placed on the list of banned or restricted countries said late Tuesday that they were evaluating the news. The government of the island nation of Dominica in the Caribbean Sea said it was treating the issue with the "utmost seriousness and urgency" and was reaching out to U.S. officials to clarify what the restrictions mean and address any problems.

Antigua and Barbuda's ambassador to the United States, Ronald Saunders, said the "matter is quite serious" and he'll be seeking more information from U.S. officials regarding the new restrictions.

The Trump administration also upgraded restrictions on some countries — Laos and Sierra Leone — that previously were on the partially restricted list and in one case — Turkmenistan — said the country had improved enough to warrant easing some restrictions on travelers from that country. Everything else from the previous travel restrictions announced in June remains in place, the administration said.

The new restrictions on Palestinians come months after the administration imposed limits that make it nearly impossible for anyone holding a Palestinian Authority passport from receiving travel documents to visit the U.S. for business, work, pleasure or educational purposes. The announcement Tuesday goes further, banning people with Palestinian Authority passports from emigrating to the U.S.

In justifying its decision Tuesday, the administration said several "U.S.-designated terrorist groups operate actively in the West Bank or Gaza Strip and have murdered American citizens." The administration also said the recent war in those areas had "likely resulted in compromised vetting and screening abilities."

Prosecutors charge Rob Reiner's son Nick with 2 counts of murder in killing of his parents

By ANDREW DALTON and CHRISTOPHER WEBER Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Rob Reiner's son Nick Reiner was charged Tuesday with two counts of first-degree murder in the killing of his parents, which stunned their communities in Hollywood and Democratic politics, where both were widely beloved.

Nick Reiner, 32, is charged with killing the 78-year-old actor and director Rob Reiner and his wife, Michele Singer Reiner, District Attorney Nathan Hochman announced at a news conference with LA Police Chief Jim McDonnell.

"Their loss is beyond tragic and we will commit ourselves to bringing their murderer to justice," Hochman said.

Along with the two counts of first degree murder, prosecutors added special circumstances of multiple murders and a special allegation that the defendant used a dangerous weapon, a knife. The additions could mean a greater sentence.

Hochman said his office has not yet decided whether to seek the death penalty in the case.

"This case is heartbreaking and deeply personal, not only for the Reiner family and their loved ones but for our entire city," McDonnell said. "We will continue to support the Reiner family and ensure that every step forward is taken with care, dignity and resolve."

The announcement came two days after the couple was found dead from apparent stab wounds in their home in the upscale Brentwood neighborhood on the west side of Los Angeles. Nick Reiner did not resist when he was arrested hours later in the Exposition Park area near the University of Southern California, about 14 miles (22.5 kilometers) from the crime scene, police said.

Reiner had been expected to make an initial court appearance earlier Tuesday, but his attorney Alan Jackson said he was not brought from the jail to the courthouse for medical reasons and the appearance was postponed to Wednesday.

Rob Reiner was the Emmy-winning star of the sitcom "All in the Family" who went on to direct films including "When Harry Met Sally..." and "The Princess Bride." He was an outspoken liberal activist for decades. Michele Singer Reiner was a photographer, movie producer and advocate for LGBTQ+ rights. They had been married for 36 years.

Representatives for the Reiner family did not respond to requests for comment. Police haven't said anything about a motive for the killings.

Nick Reiner is being held in jail without bail. He was arrested several hours after his parents were found dead in their home in the upscale Brentwood neighborhood of Los Angeles on Sunday, police said.

Jackson, the defendant's attorney, is a high-profile lawyer who represented Harvey Weinstein at his Los Angeles trial and Karen Read at her trial in Massachusetts. He was a central figure in the HBO documentary on the Read case.

Investigators believe Rob and Michele Singer Reiner died from stab wounds, a law enforcement official told The Associated Press. The official, who was briefed on the investigation, could not publicly discuss the details and spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity.

The killings were especially shocking given the warm comic legacy of the family. Rob Reiner was the son of comedy legend Carl Reiner, who died in 2020 at age 98.

Kathy Bates, who won an Oscar as the star of Rob Reiner's 1990 film "Misery," was among those paying tribute to the couple.

"I loved Rob," Bates said in a statement. "He was brilliant and kind, a man who made films of every genre to challenge himself as an artist. He also fought courageously for his political beliefs. He changed the course of my life. Michele was a gifted photographer."

Bill Clinton called the couple "good, generous people who made everyone who knew them better."

"Hillary and I are heartbroken by the tragic deaths of our friends Rob and Michele Reiner," he said in a statement. "They inspired and uplifted millions through their work in film and television."

Three months ago, Nick Reiner was photographed with his parents and siblings at the premiere of his father's film "Spinal Tap 2: The End Continues."

He had spoken publicly of his struggles with addiction, cycling in and out of treatment facilities with bouts of homelessness in between through his teen years. Rob and Nick Reiner explored — and seemed to improve — their relationship through the making of the 2016 film, "Being Charlie."

Nick Reiner co-wrote and Rob Reiner directed the film about the struggles of an addicted son and a famous father. It was not autobiographical but included several elements of their lives.

"It forced us to understand ourselves better than we had," Rob Reiner told the AP in 2016. "I told Nick while we were making it, I said, 'You know it doesn't matter, whatever happens to this thing, we won already.'"

Rob Reiner was long one of the most prolific directors in Hollywood, and his work included some of the most memorable and endlessly watchable movies of the 1980s and '90s, including "This is Spinal Tap" and "A Few Good Men."

He met Michele Singer Reiner on the set of "When Harry Met Sally..." and their meeting would inspire the film's shift to a happy ending, with stars Billy Crystal — one of Reiner's closest friends for decades — and Meg Ryan ending up together on New Year's Eve.

The Reiners were outspoken advocates for liberal causes and major Democratic donors.

President Donald Trump on Monday blamed Rob Reiner's outspoken opposition to the president for the actor-director's killing, delivering the unsubstantiated claim in a social media post that seemed intent on decrying his opponents even in the face of a tragedy.

Hegseth says he won't publicly release video of boat strike that killed survivors in the Caribbean

By STEPHEN GROVES, LISA MASCARO and BEN FINLEY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said Tuesday the Pentagon will not publicly release unedited video of a U.S. military strike that killed two survivors of an initial attack on a boat allegedly carrying cocaine in the Caribbean, as questions mounted in Congress about the incident and the overall buildup of U.S. military forces near Venezuela.

President Donald Trump further ramped up the pressure late Tuesday by announcing a blockade of all sanctioned oil tankers into Venezuela, which has long relied on oil revenue as the lifeblood of its economy.

Hegseth said members of the Armed Services Committee in the House and Senate would have an opportunity this week to review the attack video, but did not say whether all members of Congress would be allowed to see it as well.

"Of course we're not going to release a top secret, full, unedited video of that to the general public," Hegseth told reporters as he exited a closed-door briefing with senators.

Trump's Cabinet members overseeing national security were on Capitol Hill on Tuesday to defend a campaign that has killed at least 95 people in 25 known strikes on vessels in international waters in the Caribbean and eastern Pacific. Overall, they defended the campaign as a success, saying it has prevented drugs from reaching American shores, and they pushed back on concerns that it is stretching the bounds of lawful warfare.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio told reporters the campaign is a "counter-drug mission" that is "focused on dismantling the infrastructure of these terrorist organizations that are operating in our hemisphere, undermining the security of Americans, killing Americans, poisoning Americans."

Lawmakers have been focused on the Sept. 2 attack on two survivors as they sift through the rationale for a broader U.S. military buildup in the region. On the eve of the briefings, the U.S. military said it attacked three more boats believed to have been smuggling drugs in the eastern Pacific Ocean, killing eight people.

Lawmakers left in the dark about Trump's goal with Venezuela

Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer said Hegseth had come "empty handed" to the briefing,

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without a pledge to more broadly release the video of the Sept. 2 strike.

"If they can't be transparent on this, how can you trust their transparency on all the other issues swirling about in the Caribbean?" the New York Democrat said.

Senators on both sides of the aisle said the officials left them in the dark about Trump's goals when it comes to President Nicolás Maduro or sending U.S. forces directly to the South American nation.

"I want to address the question, is it the goal to take him out? If it's not the goal to take him out, you're making a mistake," said Sen. Lindsey Graham, a South Carolina Republican who defended the legality of the campaign and said he wanted to see Maduro removed from power.

The U.S. has deployed warships, flown fighter jets near Venezuelan airspace and seized an oil tanker as part of its campaign against Maduro, who has insisted the real purpose of the U.S. military operations is to force him from office. Maduro said on a weekly state television show Monday that his government still does not know the whereabouts of the tanker's crew. He criticized the United Nations for not speaking out against what he described as an "act of piracy" against "a private ship carrying Venezuelan oil."

Maduro's government for years has evaded U.S. oil sanctions by smuggling its crude into global supply chains on a shadow fleet of unflagged tankers.

Trump's Republican administration has not sought any authorization from Congress for action against Venezuela. The go-it-alone approach, experts say, has led to problematic military actions, none more so than the strike that killed two people who had climbed on top of part of a boat that had been partially destroyed in an initial attack.

"If it's not a war against Venezuela, then we're using armed force against civilians who are just committing crimes," said John Yoo, a Berkeley Law professor who helped craft the George W. Bush administration's legal arguments and justification for aggressive interrogation after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks. "Then this question, this worry, becomes really pronounced. You know, you're shooting civilians. There's no military purpose for it."

Yet for the first several months, Congress received little more than a trickle of information about why or how the U.S. military was conducting the operations. At times, lawmakers have learned of strikes from social media after the Pentagon posted videos of boats bursting into flames.

Hegseth now faces language included in an annual military policy bill that threatens to withhold a quarter of his travel budget if the Pentagon does not provide unedited video of the strikes to the House and Senate Committees on Armed Services.

The demand for release of video footage

For some, the controversy over the footage demonstrates the flawed rationale behind the entire campaign.

"The American public ought to see it. I think shooting unarmed people floundering in the water, clinging to wreckage, is not who we are as a people," said Sen. Rand Paul, a Kentucky Republican who has been an outspoken critic of the campaign.

But senators were told the Trump administration won't release all of the Sept. 2 attack footage because it would reveal U.S. military practices on intelligence gathering, said Democratic Sen. Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts. She said the reasoning ignores that the military has already released footage of the initial attack.

"They just don't want to reveal the part that suggests war crimes," she said.

Some GOP lawmakers are determined to dig into the details of the Sept. 2 attack. Adm. Frank "Mitch" Bradley, who ordered the second strike, was expected back on Capitol Hill on Wednesday for classified briefings with the Senate and House Armed Services committees. The committees would also review video of the Sept. 2 strikes, Hegseth said.

Still, many Republicans emerged from the briefings backing the campaign, defending their legality and praising the "exquisite intelligence" that is used to identify targets. House Speaker Mike Johnson called the strike "certainly appropriate" and "necessary to protect the United States and our interests."

Border Patrol official who is the face of Trump's crackdown back in Chicago amid immigration raids

By CHRISTINE FERNANDO Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — Senior Border Patrol official Greg Bovino returned to the Chicago area on Tuesday, about a month after leaving to lead immigration enforcements in other cities, immigration advocates say.

Bovino, the face of the Trump administration's immigration crackdown, was photographed Tuesday in the predominantly Mexican American neighborhood of Little Village by the Chicago Sun-Times as neighbors and activists blew whistles and shouted.

Videos obtained by The Associated Press showed several unmarked cars and Border Patrol agents deploying pepper balls and detaining a man in the neighborhood's business corridor.

Bovino arrived in the Chicago area in September amid Operation Midway Blitz, which has yielded thousands of arrests and fueled fear among immigrant communities. The operation has become known for its aggressive tactics, including the use of chemical munitions and car chases. Since the operation began, federal agents deployed tear gas in neighborhood streets, hit protesters and journalists with pepper balls and shot at least two people, killing one.

Bovino left Chicago in November to lead immigration operations in New Orleans and North Carolina. While immigration operations had continued in Chicago, they were noticeably subdued with fewer tense confrontations, and Tuesday's enforcements were among the most visible since Bovino left town.

"As we said a month ago, we aren't leaving Chicago and operations are ongoing," said Department of Homeland Security Assistant Secretary Tricia McLaughlin.

Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker complained that he was not given notice that Bovino and additional Border Patrol agents were returning to the Chicago area on Tuesday. And he said he doesn't know how long they'll stay.

Pritzker also called on Bovino to testify in front of an Illinois commission created in October to document misconduct by federal agents.

"I'm so proud of the people of Illinois, for doing as they have, which is to protect their neighborhoods and their neighbors, to do the right thing," Pritzker said Tuesday. "And so, I think we're in a much better position."

At a Tuesday news conference, activists vowed to continue supporting immigrant communities in the Chicago area. Advocates said 15 people, including day laborers and a tamale vendor, were detained Tuesday on the city's Southwest side and in suburban Berwyn and Cicero.

"We are tired but we are not weary," said Illinois State Senator Celina Villanueva. "... Every single time that they come, we are going to show up."

Victor Rodriguez II, a lifelong resident of Little Village, said he helped a woman when her husband was detained after a "caravan of masked agents began terrorizing our community," including using pepper balls in neighborhood streets. Rodriguez accused Bovino of "targeted political theater."

Bob Reiter, president of the Chicago Federation of Labor, said Border Patrol agents questioned striking laborers on Chicago's Southwest side and accused Bovino of "coming to our picket line to chill union activity."

"We have seen the first act of this political theater they have brought," he said. "Now it's the second act, and we're ready."

Australia to hold funerals for the 15 victims of an antisemitic mass shooting at Bondi Beach

By CHARLOTTE GRAHAM-McLAY and ROD McGUIRK Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia (AP) — Australia prepared for the funerals on Wednesday for some of the 15 victims of an antisemitic mass shooting during a Hanukkah celebration at Sydney's Bondi Beach, an attack that police said was inspired by the Islamic State group.

The victims were between 10 and 87 years old. Twenty-two people who were injured in the attack remained in Sydney hospitals Wednesday, six of them in a critical condition.

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Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said Tuesday that the IS link assessment was based on evidence obtained, including "the presence of Islamic State flags in the vehicle that has been seized."

Among the injured in the hospital is Ahmed al Ahmed, hailed as a hero after he was captured on video tackling and disarming one of the assailants, before pointing the man's weapon at him and then setting it on the ground. Three other people who tried to stop the gunmen were shot and killed.

A horrific attack

The gunshots rang out as members of Australia's Jewish community attended festivities at Australia's most famous beach Sunday.

They included Boris and Sofia Gurman, identified on Wednesday as a married couple who were the first killed when they tried to stop one of the shooters as he climbed from his car.

The suspects were a father and son, aged 50 and 24, authorities said. The father, whom state officials named as Sajid Akram, was shot and killed. His son, who hasn't been formally named by the authorities, was being treated at a hospital.

The son emerged from a coma on Tuesday, said Mal Lanyon, police commissioner for New South Wales state, where Sydney is located. Lanyon told 702 ABC Radio Sydney that investigators expected to speak to and charge him on Wednesday.

Calls for stricter gun laws

Albanese and the leaders of some of Australia's states have pledged to tighten the country's already strict gun laws in what would be the most sweeping reforms since a shooter killed 35 people in Port Arthur, Tasmania, in 1996. Mass shootings in Australia have since been rare.

Three days after the attack, public anger has grown. Questions are being raised how the suspects were able to carry out such an attack and whether Australian Jews are being sufficiently protected from rising antisemitism.

Albanese announced plans to further restrict access to guns, in part because it emerged the older suspect had amassed six weapons legally.

Authorities probe the suspects' trip to the Philippines

Indian police on Tuesday said the older suspect was originally from the southern city of Hyderabad and held an Indian passport. They said he married a woman of European origin and migrated to Australia in 1998 in search of employment opportunities, maintaining little contact with his family in India.

"The family members have expressed no knowledge of his radical mindset or activities, nor of the circumstances that led to his radicalization," Telangana State Police Chief, B. Shivadhar Reddy said.

Last month, the suspects traveled to the Philippines, Lanyon told reporters Tuesday. An investigation will look into why and where they traveled, he said and also confirmed that a vehicle removed from the scene, registered to the younger suspect, contained improvised explosive devices.

"I also confirm that it contained two homemade ISIS flags," Lanyon said, referring to the militant group by one of its acronyms.

The Philippines Bureau of Immigration confirmed Tuesday that Sajid Akram traveled to the country from Nov. 1 to Nov. 28 along with Naveed Akram, 24, giving the city of Davao as their final destination. Australian authorities have not confirmed this nor the younger suspect's name.

Groups of Muslim separatist militants, including Abu Sayyaf in the southern Philippines, once expressed support for IS and have hosted small numbers of foreign militants from Asia, the Middle East and Europe in the past.

Decades of military offensives, however, have considerably weakened Abu Sayyaf and other such armed groups, and Philippine military and police officials say there has been no recent indication of any foreign militants in the country's south.

Albanese visits man who tackled shooter

Many Australians have celebrated stories of the heroism of those who tried to stop the horror.

Albanese visited al Ahmed in a hospital on Tuesday, where he said the 44-year-old Syrian-born Muslim shop owner had further surgery scheduled for shotgun wounds to his left shoulder and upper body.

"It was a great honor to met Ahmed al Ahmed. He is a true Australian hero," Albanese told reporters

after a 30-minute meeting with him and his parents.

"We are a brave country. Ahmed al Ahmed represents the best of our country. We will not allow this country to be divided. That is what the terrorists seek. We will unite. We will embrace each other, and we'll get through this," Albanese added.

Lifeguards praised for their actions during the massacre

The famous blue-shirted lifeguards of Bondi Beach also attracted praise as more stories of their actions during the shooting emerged.

One duty lifeguard, identified by the organization's Instagram account as Rory Davey, performed an ocean rescue during the shooting after people fled, fully clothed, into the sea.

Another lifeguard, Jackson Doolan, posted to his social media a photo taken as he sprinted, barefoot and clutching a first aid kit, from Tamarama beach a mile away toward Bondi as the massacre continued.

"These guys are community members and it's not about the surf," Anthony Caroll, one of the stars of a popular reality television show called "Bondi Rescue," told Sky News on Tuesday. "They heard the gunshots and they left the beach and came right up the back here into the scene of the crime, into harm's way."

Record numbers of Australians sign up to donate blood

Israeli Ambassador to Australia Amir Maimon visited the scene of the carnage on Tuesday and was welcomed by Jewish leaders.

"I'm not sure that my vocabulary is rich enough to express how I feel. My heart is torn apart because the Jewish community, the Australians of Jewish faith, the Jewish community is also my community," Maimon said.

Thousands have visited Bondi from all walks of life to pay their respects and lay flowers at an impromptu memorial site. Among them was former Prime Minister John Howard, who was responsible for the 1996 overhaul of gun laws and an associated buyback of newly outlawed weapons.

A record number of Australians signed up to donate blood in the aftermath of the attack, including almost 1,300 people signed up to donate for the first time. Donation appointments were booked until Dec. 31 at Lifeblood's Bondi location, according to the organization's website.

Australian news outlets reported queues of up to four hours at some Sydney donation sites.

Doctor who helped sell ketamine to actor Matthew Perry before his overdose death avoids prison time

By JAIMIE DING Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — A doctor who pleaded guilty in a scheme to supply ketamine to actor Matthew Perry before his overdose death was sentenced Tuesday to 8 months of home confinement.

Judge Sherilyn Peace Garnett handed down the sentence that included 3 years of supervised release to 55-year-old Dr. Mark Chavez in a federal courtroom in Los Angeles.

Before the sentence was delivered, Chavez addressed the judge and said he had lost a loved one recently and understood the grief that Perry's death has caused.

"I just want to say my heart goes out to the Perry family," he said.

Chavez acquired ketamine and gave it to Dr. Salvador Plasencia, who was sentenced to 2 1/2 years in prison earlier this month for selling ketamine to Perry in the months leading up to his death.

Chavez's attorneys emphasized the difference between the two doctors and said that Chavez "accepted responsibility early" by cooperating with investigators and voluntarily giving up his medical license ahead of his detention hearing.

"These are real steps that someone takes toward accountability," attorney Matthew Binninger said.

He called the sentence a "fair and just outcome" for the case.

Perry had been taking the surgical anesthetic ketamine legally as a treatment for depression. But when his regular doctor wouldn't provide it in the amounts he wanted, he turned to Plasencia.

Plasencia admitted to taking advantage of Perry, knowing he was a struggling addict. Plasencia texted Chavez that Perry was a "moron" who could be exploited for money, according to court filings.

Chavez admitted to obtaining the ketamine from a wholesale distributor on false pretenses and pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to distribute ketamine. He has not been in custody.

Perry struggled with addiction for years, dating back to his time on "Friends," when he became one of the biggest TV stars of his generation as Chandler Bing. He starred alongside Jennifer Aniston, Courteney Cox, Lisa Kudrow, Matt LeBlanc and David Schwimmer for 10 seasons from 1994 to 2004 on NBC's megahit.

Chavez is the second person to be sentenced of the five defendants who have pleaded guilty in connection with Perry's death at age 54 in 2023.

Perry was found dead by his assistant on Oct. 28. The medical examiner ruled ketamine was the primary cause of death. The actor had been using the drug through his regular doctor in a legal but off-label treatment for depression that has become increasingly common.

Seeking more ketamine than his doctor would give him, about a month before his death Perry found Plasencia, who in turn asked Chavez to obtain the drug for him.

He met with Plasencia between San Diego and Los Angeles to hand off ketamine he got using fraudulent prescriptions. In all, he admitted to supplying 22 5-milliliter vials of ketamine and nine ketamine lozenges.

Chavez will also be expected to do 300 hours of community service.

The other three defendants who reached deals to plead guilty will be sentenced at their own hearings in the coming months. Garnett has said she would seek to make sure all the sentences made sense in relation to one another.

Indiana's Curt Cignetti becomes the first back-to-back winner of AP coach of the year

By ERIC OLSON AP College Football Writer

Indiana's Curt Cignetti exceeded expectations again this season and it earned him a second consecutive honor as The Associated Press coach of the year in college football.

Cignetti is the first coach to win the award in back-to-back years since it was first presented in 1998. He is the fourth coach to win it twice, joining Brian Kelly, Gary Patterson and Nick Saban.

The 64-year-old Cignetti is 24-2 while leading the Hoosiers to unprecedented heights in his two seasons since leaving James Madison of the Championship Subdivision to take over what had been the losingest program in major college football. Last year, the Hoosiers won their first 10 games, were ranked as high as No. 5 in the AP Top 25, and reached the first round of the College Football Playoff.

He outdid himself this year, showing his smashing debut was not a one-off.

Indiana is 13-0, Big Ten champion for the first time since 1967, No. 1 in the AP poll for the first time and the top seed for the CFP. He also is coach of Indiana's first Heisman Trophy winner, quarterback Fernando Mendoza, the AP player of the year.

Cignetti was a landslide winner for coach of the year in voting by the nationwide panel of 52 media members who cover college football. Cignetti received 47 first-place votes. Texas Tech's Joey McGuire and Vanderbilt's Clark Lea received two each, and Virginia's Tony Elliott got one.

The magnitude of Cignetti's work at Indiana can't be overstated.

In 2022, the Hoosiers became the first Bowl Subdivision program to reach 700 all-time losses. They entered this season with 714, a figure that still stands, and they've since been passed by Northwestern (717) for the dubious FBS mark.

In a program that had never won more than nine games in a season before Cignetti's arrival, the Hoosiers have double-digit wins for a second straight year and completed a regular season without a loss for the first time.

Cignetti had said before last week that his program was chasing Ohio State in recruiting and on the field. The 13-10 win over the Buckeyes in the Big Ten championship game marked another milestone.

"It's another step we need to take as a program," he said after the game. "It's a great win, obviously. And we're going to go in the playoffs as the No. 1 seed. And a lot of people probably thought that wasn't possible. But when you get the right people and you have a plan and they love one another and play for one another and they commit, anything's possible."

Susie Wiles, White House chief of staff, criticizes Bondi and opines on Trump in Vanity Fair

By MICHELLE L. PRICE, DARLENE SUPERVILLE and BILL BARROW Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Susie Wiles, President Donald Trump's understated but influential chief of staff, criticized Attorney General Pam Bondi's handling of the Jeffrey Epstein case and offered an unvarnished take on her boss and those in his orbit in interviews published Tuesday in Vanity Fair that sent the West Wing into damage control.

The startlingly candid remarks from Wiles, the first woman to ever hold her current post, included describing the president as someone with "an alcoholic's personality," and Vice President JD Vance as a calculating "conspiracy theorist." The observations from Wiles, who rarely speaks publicly given the behind-the-scenes nature of her job running the White House, prompted questions about whether the chief of staff might be on her way out.

Wiles pushed back after the piece's publication, describing it as a "hit piece" that lacked context, and White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said the "entire Administration is grateful for her steady leadership and united fully behind her."

As for Trump, he told the New York Post that he hadn't read the piece. When asked if he retained confidence in Wiles, he said, "Oh, she's fantastic."

Trump also agreed that he does have the personality of an alcoholic, describing himself as having "a very possessive personality."

A senior White House official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to describe internal thinking, dismissed the notion that Wiles might leave because of the profile, saying if they were rattled by negative news coverage "none of us would work here."

Wiles' candor was so unusual that Rahm Emanuel, who served as chief of staff to former President Barack Obama, said that when he first read her comments, he thought it was a spoof. He said he could not recall a chief of staff giving such a candid interview, at least "not while you hold the title."

Emanuel said the role often involves public remarks that promote the president's agenda, but not sharing personal views about "everything, everybody" in the White House.

His advice to Wiles: "Next time there's a meal, bring a food taster."

Candor from the 'ice maiden' who stays behind the scenes

The interviews with Vanity Fair were themselves uncharacteristic for Wiles, who cut her reputation as someone who brought order to the president's chaotic style and shunned the spotlight so much that at Trump's 2024 election night victory party, she repeatedly shook her head and avoided the microphone as Trump tried to coax her to speak to the crowd.

"Susie likes to stay sort of in the back," said Trump, who has repeatedly referred to her as the "ice maiden."

Most members of his Cabinet, along with former and current White House officials, posted statements praising Wiles and criticizing the media as dishonest.

But neither Wiles nor the members of the administration who came to her defense Tuesday disputed any details in the two-part profile, including areas where she conceded mistakes and seemed to contradict the administration's official reasoning for its bombing of alleged drug boats in the waters off the coast of Venezuela.

Though the Trump administration has said the campaign is about stopping drugs headed to the U.S., Wiles appeared to confirm that the campaign is part of a push to oust Venezuela's authoritarian leader, Nicolás Maduro, saying Trump "wants to keep on blowing boats up until Maduro cries uncle."

Wiles pushed back but without any denials

After the comments were published, Wiles disparaged it as a "disingenuously framed hit piece on me and the finest President, White House staff, and Cabinet in history."

"Significant context was disregarded and much of what I, and others, said about the team and the President was left out of the story," she wrote in a social media post. "I assume, after reading it, that this was done to paint an overwhelmingly chaotic and negative narrative about the President and our team."

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Trump, in an interview with the New York Post, said he was not offended by Wiles' remarks, including her description of him as someone with "an alcoholic's personality" that she recognizes from her father, the famous sports broadcaster Pat Summerall.

The president, who is a teetotaler and had a brother who struggled with alcohol, said: "I've said that many times about myself. I'm fortunate I'm not a drinker. If I did, I could very well, because I've said that — what's the word? Not possessive — possessive and addictive type personality. Oh, I've said it many times, many times before."

Vance, speaking in Pennsylvania on Tuesday about the president's economic agenda, said he hadn't read the Vanity Fair piece. But he defended Wiles and joked, "I only believe in the conspiracy theories that are true."

"Susie Wiles, we have our disagreements. We agree on much more than we disagree, but I've never seen her be disloyal to the president of the United States, and that makes her the best White House chief of staff that I think the president could ask for," Vance said.

He said his takeaway was that the administration "should be giving fewer interviews to mainstream media outlets."

The chief of staff criticizes the attorney general

Wiles, over the series of interviews, described the president behind the scenes very much as he presents himself in public: an intense figure who thinks in broad strokes yet is often not concerned with the details of process and policy. She added, though, that he has not been as angry or temperamental as is often suggested, even as she affirmed his ruthlessness and determination to achieve retribution against those he considers his political enemies.

Wiles described much of her job as channeling Trump's energy, whims and desired policy outcomes -- including managing his desire for vengeance against his political opponents, anyone he blames for his 2020 electoral defeat and those who pursued criminal cases against him after his first term.

On Epstein, Wiles told the magazine that she underestimated the scandal involving the disgraced financier, but she sharply criticized how Bondi managed the case and the public's expectations.

Wiles criticized Bondi's handling of the matter, going back to earlier in the year when she distributed binders to a group of social media influencers that included no new information about Epstein. That led to even more calls from Trump's base for the files to be released.

"I think she completely whiffed on appreciating that that was the very targeted group that cared about this," Wiles said of Bondi. "First she gave them binders full of nothingness. And then she said that the witness list, or the client list, was on her desk. There is no client list, and it sure as hell wasn't on her desk."

Bondi did not address the criticism when she released a statement supporting Wiles.

Wiles also said at one point that Trump's tariffs had been more painful than expected. She conceded some mistakes in Trump's mass deportation program and suggested that the president's retribution campaign against his perceived political enemies has gone beyond what she initially wanted.

Wall Street slips as oil prices keep dropping

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The U.S. stock market drifted through a mixed day of trading Tuesday after reports on the economy did little to clear uncertainty about where interest rates may be heading.

The S&P 500 slipped 0.2% and remains a bit below its all-time high set last week. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dipped 302 points, or 0.6%, and the Nasdaq composite rose 0.2%.

Treasury yields eased in the bond market after one report said the U.S. unemployment rate was at its worst level since 2021, but employers also added more jobs last month than economists expected. A separate report, meanwhile, said an underlying measure of strength for revenue at U.S. retailers grew more in October than economists expected.

The mixed data meant little change in traders' hopes that the Federal Reserve may continue to cut interest rates further in 2026. What the Fed does with interest rates is a top driver for financial markets because

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lower rates can boost the economy and prices for investments, even if they also may worsen inflation.

A report coming on Thursday will show how bad inflation was last month, and economists expect it to show prices for U.S. consumers continue to rise faster than anyone would like.

A report released on Tuesday after U.S. stocks began trading suggested price pressures are rising sharply, with average selling prices for businesses climbing at one of the fastest rates since the middle of 2022. The preliminary data from S&P Global also said growth for overall business activity slowed to its weakest level since June.

"Higher prices are again being widely blamed on tariffs, with an initial impact on manufacturing now increasingly spilling over to services to broaden the affordability problem," according to Chris Williamson, chief business economist at S&P Global Market Intelligence.

On Wall Street, the sharpest losses came from companies in the oil business as prices for crude kept sliding.

Expectations that companies are pumping more than enough oil to meet the world's demand have sent the price for a barrel of benchmark U.S. crude to its lowest level since 2021. It fell 2.7% Monday, as did Brent crude, the international standard. U.S. crude settled at \$55.27 per barrel, while Brent settled at \$58.92.

That drove APA's stock down 5.2%. Marathon Petroleum sank 4.7% and Halliburton dropped 4.3% for some of Wall Street's larger losses.

Artificial-intelligence technology stocks, meanwhile, were mixed after dominating the market in recent days.

Oracle rose 2%, and Broadcom added 0.4%. They both had dropped to sharp losses last week, even though both reported stronger profits for the latest quarter than analysts expected.

But CoreWeave, which rents out access to top-of-the-line AI chips, fell 3.9%.

Questions remain about whether all the spending underway on AI technology will produce the kind of profits and productivity that will make it worth the expense.

Elsewhere on Wall Street, Pfizer fell 3.4% after giving a forecast for profit in 2026 that was below what some analysts expected. Its forecast for revenue next year was close to analysts' expectations.

Kraft Heinz added 0.7% after saying Steve Cahillane, who was most recently CEO of Kellanova, will join as CEO on Jan. 1. After Kraft Heinz splits into two companies, which is expected to happen in the second half of 2026, Cahillane will lead the one that will hold onto the Heinz, Philadelphia and Kraft Mac & Cheese brands.

All told, the S&P 500 fell 16.25 points to 6,800.26. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped 302.30 to 48,114.26, and the Nasdaq composite rose 54.05 to 23,111.46.

In stock markets abroad, indexes fell across much of Europe and Asia.

Japan's Nikkei 225 dropped 1.6% ahead of an expected hike to interest rates by the Bank of Japan later this week.

Other markets in Asia also had some of the world's sharper swings. South Korea's Kospi dropped 2.2%, while indexes fell 1.5% in Hong Kong and 1.1% in Shanghai.

In the bond market, the yield on the 10-year Treasury fell to 4.14% from 4.18% late Monday.

House Speaker Johnson rebuffs efforts to extend health care subsidies, pushing ahead with GOP plan

By KEVIN FREKING and LISA MASCARO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Republican leaders are determined to push ahead with a GOP health care bill that excludes efforts to address the soaring monthly premiums millions of Americans will soon endure as pandemic-era tax credits for people who buy insurance through the Affordable Care Act expire at year's end.

Speaker Mike Johnson had discussed the prospect of allowing more politically vulnerable GOP lawmakers a chance to vote on their amendment that would temporarily extend pandemic-era subsidies for ACA coverage. But after days of private talks, leadership sided with the more conservative wing of the confer-

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ence, which has assailed the subsidies as propping up a failed ACA marketplace.

"We looked for a way to try to allow for that pressure release valve," Johnson said Tuesday at the Capitol. "In the end, it was not — an agreement wasn't made."

The maneuvering surrounding the health care vote all but guarantees that many Americans will see substantially higher insurance costs in 2026. In the Senate, a bipartisan group was still trying to come up with a compromise to extend the subsidies, which fueled this year's government shutdown. But senators made clear that any potential legislation would likely wait until January, after the holiday break.

Instead, House Republicans will pursue their 100-plus-page health care package that focuses on long-sought GOP proposals designed to expand insurance coverage options for small businesses and the self-employed. A test vote is expected Wednesday.

The Republicans' package would clamp down on middlemen called pharmacy benefit managers who work to manage drug costs and process claims for insurance plans. The bill would also expand access to what's referred to as association health plans, which would allow more small businesses and self-employed individuals to band together and purchase health coverage.

An analysis from the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office and the Joint Committee on Taxation estimates the package would decrease the number of people with health insurance by an average of 100,000 per year over a 2027-2035 window, while reducing the federal deficit by \$35.6 billion.

Failing to address expiring insurance subsidies 'political malpractice'

Rep. Mike Lawler, R-N.Y., blasted the leadership's decision to not allow for a vote to temporarily extend the health insurance subsidies, saying it amounted to "political malpractice."

Lawler, who hails from a competitive district, noted that most people who get their health coverage through the Affordable Care Act live in states that President Donald Trump won and said the changes proposed for a temporary extension were "conservative reforms." He also criticized Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries for not pushing Democrats to support a pair of bipartisan extension efforts.

"You have two leaders who are not serious about solving this problem," Lawler said of Johnson and Jeffries.

Still, the centrist Republicans indicated they would not try to block the Republican leadership's measure from coming to a vote.

Johnson defended the House GOP's bill, which includes priorities that Republicans have been working on for several years.

"We have a long list of things that we know will reduce premiums, increase access and quality of care," Johnson said. "The Democrats have zero ideas, zero concepts and zero legislative plans on anything they'll propose other than just subsidizing the broken system."

Democrats said even if the bill passes the House, it will not pass the Senate, where it would need 60 votes and bipartisan support to advance. They said it was not a serious effort to address rising costs.

"Millions will be priced out of their coverage, and those who can still afford it will get less while paying more," said Rep. Suzan DelBene, chair of the House Democratic campaign arm. "Republicans are ignoring the pain, the pain we're seeing across the country for everyday Americans. And make no mistake, it is going to cost them the majority."

GOP bill focuses on insurance options and cost-sharing

During Trump's first term, his administration sought to expand access to association health plans that don't have to offer the full menu of benefits required under current law. The option offers lower premiums for small businesses and self-employed people, but the policies are likely to cover fewer benefits. A federal judge who struck down the administration's effort in 2018 said the plans were "clearly an end-run" around consumer protections required by the Affordable Care Act, also known as Obamacare.

The House Republican plan would also restore government funding for cost-sharing reductions, or CSRs, a type of financial help that insurers give to low-income ACA enrollees on silver-level plans that reduces their share of costs like deductibles and copays.

From 2014 until 2017, the federal government reimbursed insurance companies for CSRs — but in 2017,

the Trump administration stopped making those payments. To make up for the lost funds, insurance companies hiked premiums for silver-level plans -- a complicated move that ended up increasing the financial assistance many enrollees get to help pay for premiums.

As a result, health analysts say that while restoring funding for CSRs would likely bring down silver-level premiums, it could also have the unwelcome ripple effect of increasing many people's net premiums on bronze and gold plans.

The provisions related to pharmacy benefit managers require the middlemen to disclose certain data about their operations to group health plans, with the hope that more transparency would reduce prescription drug costs.

Senators revive talks of action in the new year

Almost two dozen Republicans and Democrats met late Monday to talk about a last-minute fix on the ACA tax credits after the Senate rejected two partisan health care bills last week. They emerged from the meeting discussing ways to end the stalemate, including a possible two-year extension of the subsidies with reforms that would narrow who could receive them. They also discussed adding some version of a GOP proposal to create new health savings accounts that would help people purchase insurance.

Maine Sen. Susan Collins, a Republican who led the bipartisan meeting, said the group would like to announce a proposal this week. But there were still significant unresolved issues, including whether to include stricter language on abortion funding. Disagreements over abortion were one of the main sticking points in earlier talks that derailed a compromise.

Senate Majority Leader John Thune said there's a "potential pathway" to an agreement in January, but acknowledged, "we're not going to pass anything by the end of this week."

Sen. Mark Kelly calls Pentagon investigation into his remarks a move to chill military dissent

By KONSTANTIN TOROPIN and BEN FINLEY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Democratic Sen. Mark Kelly of Arizona said Tuesday that the Pentagon's escalating investigation into his remarks urging troops to refuse unlawful orders is part of an effort to silence dissent within the military.

"This is just about sending a message to retired service members, active duty service members, government employees — do not speak out against this president or there will be consequences," Kelly told reporters after a classified briefing from Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, Secretary of State Marco Rubio and others about deadly strikes on alleged drug boats in Latin America that Kelly and other lawmakers have opposed.

Kelly said the Defense Department did not notify him of an investigation because "what they really care about is the public message."

The Pentagon confirmed late Monday that Hegseth's office escalated a preliminary review of Kelly to an official command investigation over "serious allegations of misconduct."

Command investigations are a very common tool used by military officials to look into allegations of wrongdoing that don't rise to the level of criminal charges. It is far less common for them to be used against a retired service member, much less a sitting member of Congress.

The investigation heightens tensions between the Democratic senator, who was a Navy fighter pilot before becoming an astronaut, and the Trump administration's Pentagon, coming as lawmakers have increased scrutiny of the U.S. military's attacks on boats accused of smuggling drugs in the Caribbean Sea and eastern Pacific Ocean.

Kelly's lawyers push back on the investigation

In a letter this week to the Pentagon, Kelly's lawyers said that "there is no legitimate basis for any type of proceeding" and that "any such effort would be unconstitutional and an extraordinary abuse of power."

The investigation was ordered after President Donald Trump accused six Democratic lawmakers of sedition "punishable by DEATH" after they appeared in the video urging troops to defy undefined illegal orders.

Hegseth said Kelly is the only one of the lawmakers who formally retired from the military and is still under the Pentagon's jurisdiction, arguing that "Kelly's conduct brings discredit upon the armed forces."

The Defense Department also said it could recall Kelly to active duty for court-martial proceedings.

Legal experts have said Kelly did nothing illegal, the Pentagon was misreading military law and that he could not be prosecuted by the executive branch as a member of Congress.

Former JAG sees no path to a court-martial

Todd Huntley, a retired Navy captain and judge advocate general, said he believes that if Pentagon officials really thought there was something about Kelly's actions that could lead to a court-martial, the inquiry likely would have been handed over to the Naval Criminal Investigative Service.

"It's a realization that they are not going to be able to court-martial him and that is what this is setting up is some sort of administrative action," Huntley said.

He said one of the most likely actions that Kelly could face is a non-punitive letter of censure. It would have almost no actual impact because Kelly is no longer in active service.

The video was released in November by Democrats who served in the military or intelligence community: Kelly, Sen. Elissa Slotkin and Reps. Jason Crow, Chris Deluzio, Maggie Goodlander and Chrissy Houlahan. The lawmakers, who are seen as possible future aspirants for higher office and elevated their political profiles with the video's wide exposure, spoke "directly to members of the military."

Kelly told troops that "you can refuse illegal orders," while other lawmakers in the video said they needed troops to "stand up for our laws ... our Constitution."

The lawmakers didn't mention specific circumstances. But their message was released amid the boat strike campaign and Trump's attempts to deploy National Guard troops to American cities.

Democrats and others have called out boat strikes

The issue of illegal orders became even more salient following the revelations of a follow-up strike that killed two survivors clinging to the wreckage of a boat after the first hit, which some legal experts and lawmakers say went against the laws of war.

Trump and several Republican lawmakers have argued that it was justified because the people were trying to overturn the boat and stay in the fight. The administration says the attacks overall are aimed at stemming the flow of narcotics into the country and that the U.S. is engaged in an "armed conflict" with drug cartels.

When it announced its investigation into Kelly, the Pentagon suggested his statements interfered with the "loyalty, morale, or good order and discipline of the armed forces" by citing the federal law that prohibits such actions.

Kelly has rejected the claims by Trump and the Pentagon, saying he upheld his oath to the Constitution.

"They're trying to shut people up," he said Tuesday. "But in this case, they picked the wrong guy. So I'm not going to shut up about this."

Trump will go to Delaware for the dignified transfer of the 2 National Guard members killed in Syria

By SEUNG MIN KIM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump is traveling to Dover Air Force Base in Delaware on Wednesday for a dignified transfer for the two Iowa National Guard members killed in an attack in the Syrian desert that is testing the rapprochement between Washington and Damascus.

The two guardsmen killed in the attack on Saturday were Sgt. Edgar Brian Torres-Tovar, 25, of Des Moines, and Sgt. William Nathaniel Howard, 29, of Marshalltown, according to the U.S. Army. Both were members of the 1st Squadron, 113th Cavalry Regiment. A U.S. civilian working as an interpreter, identified Tuesday as Ayad Mansoor Sakat of Macomb, Michigan, was also killed.

The ritual at Dover Air Force Base honors U.S. service members killed in action and is one of the most solemn duties undertaken by the commander in chief.

During the process, transfer cases draped with the American flag holding the remains of fallen soldiers

are carried from the military aircraft that carried them to Dover to an awaiting vehicle to transport them to the mortuary facility at the base. There, the fallen service members are prepared for their final resting place.

Trump, a Republican, said during his first term that witnessing the dignified transfer of service members' remains is "the toughest thing I have to do" as president.

Remembered as 'the best of Iowa'

The Iowa National Guard is remembering the two men as heroes. Howard's stepfather, Jeffrey Bunn, said Howard "loved what he was doing and would be the first in and last out," noting that he had wanted to be a soldier since he was a young boy.

In a post on the Meskwaki Nation Police Department's Facebook page, Bunn — who is chief of the Tama, Iowa, department — called Howard a loving husband and an "amazing man of faith" and said Howard's brother, a staff sergeant in the Iowa National Guard, would escort "Nate" back to Iowa.

Torres-Tovar was remembered as a "very positive" person who was family oriented and someone who always put others first, according to fellow guardsmen who were deployed with Torres-Tovar and issued a statement to the local TV broadcast station WOI.

"They were dedicated professionals and cherished members of our Guard family who represented the best of Iowa," said Maj. Gen. Stephen Osborn, adjutant general of the Iowa National Guard.

Trump stands by Syrian leader al-Sharaa

On Saturday, Trump told reporters that he was mourning the deaths and vowed retaliation.

Trump said Monday that he remained confident in the leadership of interim Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa, the onetime leader of an Islamic insurgent group who led the ouster of former President Bashar Assad, whose family had an iron grip on Syrian rule for decades.

The U.S. president welcomed al-Sharaa to Washington last month for a historic visit to the White House and formally welcomed Syria as a member of the U.S.-led coalition to fight the Islamic State group. Hundreds of U.S. troops are deployed in eastern Syria as part of a coalition fighting IS.

"This had nothing to do with him," Trump told reporters in the Oval Office on Monday. "This had to do with ISIS."

Three other members of the Iowa National Guard were injured in the attack. As of Monday, two were in stable condition and the other in good condition. The Pentagon has not identified them.

Trump traveled to Dover several times during his first term to honor the fallen, including for a U.S. Navy SEAL killed during a raid in Yemen, for two Army officers whose helicopter crashed in Afghanistan and for two Army soldiers killed in Afghanistan when a person dressed in an Afghan army uniform opened fire.

Zelenskyy says proposals to end the war in Ukraine could be presented to Russia within days

By ILLIA NOVIKOV Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy says proposals being negotiated with U.S. officials for a deal to end the fighting in Russia's nearly 4-year-old invasion of his country could be finalized within days, after which American envoys will present them to the Kremlin before possible further meetings in the U.S. next weekend.

A draft peace plan discussed with the U.S. during talks in Berlin on Monday is "not perfect" but is "very workable," Zelenskyy told reporters hours after the discussions. He cautioned, however, that some key issues — notably what happens to Ukrainian territory occupied by Russian forces — remain unresolved.

U.S.-led peace efforts appear to be picking up momentum. But as the spotlight shifts to Moscow, Russian President Vladimir Putin may balk at some of the proposals thrashed out by officials from Washington, Kyiv and Western Europe, including postwar security guarantees for Ukraine.

Zelenskyy said that after the Berlin talks, "we are very close to (a deal on) strong security guarantees."

The security proposal will be based on Western help in keeping the Ukrainian army strong, an official

from a NATO nation said, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive matters.

"Europeans will lead a multinational and multi-domain force to strengthen those troops and to secure Ukraine from the land, sea and air, and the U.S. will lead a ceasefire monitoring and verification mechanism, with international participation," the official said.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov repeated Tuesday that Russia wants a comprehensive peace deal, not a temporary truce.

If Ukraine seeks "momentary, unsustainable solutions, we are unlikely to be ready to participate," he said.

"We want peace — we don't want a truce that would give Ukraine a respite and prepare for the continuation of the war," he told reporters. "We want to stop this war, achieve our goals, secure our interests, and guarantee peace in Europe for the future."

American officials said Monday there's consensus from Ukraine and Europe on about 90% of the U.S.-authored peace plan. U.S. President Donald Trump said: "I think we're closer now than we have been, ever" to a peace settlement.

Plenty of potential pitfalls remain, notably the land issue.

Zelenskyy reiterated that Kyiv rules out recognizing Moscow's control over any part of the Donbas, an economically important region in eastern Ukraine made up of Luhansk and Donetsk. Russia's army doesn't fully control either but Trump has previously indicated that Ukraine will have to cede territory.

"The Americans are trying to find a compromise," Zelenskyy said, before visiting the Netherlands on Tuesday. "They are proposing a 'free economic zone' (in the Donbas). And I want to stress once again: a 'free economic zone' does not mean under the control of the Russian Federation."

Putin wants all the areas in four key regions that his forces have seized, as well as the Crimean Peninsula, which Moscow illegally annexed in 2014, to be recognized as Russian territory.

Zelenskyy warned that if Putin rejects diplomatic efforts, Ukraine expects increased Western pressure on Moscow, including tougher sanctions and additional military support for defense, such as enhanced air defense systems and long-range weapons.

Zelenskyy said that what's driving Kyiv officials in the negotiations is for Russia to be "held accountable for what it has done — for this war, for all the killings, for all the suffering."

Ukraine and the U.S. are preparing up to five documents related to the peace framework, several of them focused on security, Zelenskyy said.

He was upbeat about the progress in the Berlin talks.

"Overall, there was a demonstration of unity," Zelenskyy said. "It was truly positive in the sense that it reflected the unity of the U.S., Europe, and Ukraine."

Court battle begins over California's new congressional map designed to favor Democrats

By MICHAEL R. BLOOD and TRẦN NGUYỄN Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The fight over California's new congressional map designed to help Democrats flip a string of U.S. House seats kicked off in court Monday, where a panel of federal judges is considering whether the rejiggered districts approved by voters last month can be used in elections.

The hearing in Los Angeles sets the stage for a high-stakes legal and political fight between the Trump administration and Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom, who's been eyeing a 2028 presidential run. The lawsuit asks a three-judge panel to grant a temporary restraining order blocking the new map by Dec. 19 — the date candidates can take the first official steps to run in the 2026 elections when GOP control of the House will be in play.

Voters approved California's new House map in November in so-called Proposition 50. It's designed to help Democrats flip as many as five seats in the midterm elections. It was Newsom's response to a Republican-led effort in Texas backed by President Donald Trump.

The showdown between the nation's two most populous states has spread nationally, with efforts aiming

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to determine which party controls Congress for the second half of Trump's term. Missouri, North Carolina and Ohio have adopted new district lines that could provide a partisan advantage.

Some plans are facing legal challenges, but the Supreme Court ruled earlier this month to allow Texas to use its new map for the 2026 election. The Justice Department has only sued California.

The Justice Department, joining a case brought by the California Republican Party, has accused California of gerrymandering its map in violation of the Constitution by using race as a factor to favor Hispanic voters. Republicans want the court to prohibit California from using the new map. Voters approved the map for the 2026, 2028 and 2030 elections. State Democrats said they're confident the lawsuit will fail.

"In letting Texas use its gerrymandered maps, the Supreme Court noted that California's maps, like Texas', were drawn for lawful reasons," Newsom's spokesperson Brandon Richards said in a statement. "That should be the beginning and the end of this Republican effort to silence the voters of California."

The lawsuit cites a news release from state Democrats that says the new map "retains and expands Voting Rights Act districts that empower Latino voters" while making no changes to Black majority districts in the Oakland and Los Angeles areas. The federal Voting Rights Act, passed in the 1960s, sets rules for drawing districts to ensure minority groups have adequate political power. The lawsuit also cites a Cal Poly Pomona and Caltech study that concludes the new map would increase Latino voting power.

"Race cannot be used as a proxy to advance political interests, but that is precisely what the California General Assembly did with Proposition 50 — the recent ballot initiative that junked California's pre-existing electoral map in favor of a rush-job rejiggering of California's congressional district lines," the lawsuit said.

The Justice Department alleges that Paul Mitchell, a redistricting consultant who drew the map for Democrats, and state leaders admitted that they redrew some districts to have a Latino majority.

The hearing began with a dense, technical discussion spotlighting how one of the districts — the 13th, in the state's Central Valley — was designed, touching on issues like the Hispanic voting age population, census population blocks and different software used manage and massage the data.

"Race was the predominant interest in drawing the district," elections analyst Sean Trende, called by the plaintiffs, told the judges. He pointed to a thumb-like appendage jutting out of the northern end of the new district, which he characterized as a precise knife cut to capture certain voters.

Defense attorneys picked away at his analysis, questioning in part whether political shifts in the region could have dictated how lines were drawn rather than racial considerations. At one point Trende acknowledged that the thumb-like bump in the district boundary was not as extreme as congressional maps seen in other states.

New U.S. House maps are drawn across the country after the Census every 10 years. Some states like California rely on an independent commission to draw maps, while others like Texas let politicians draw them. The effort to create new maps in the middle of the decade is highly unusual.

House Democrats need to gain just a handful of seats next year to take control of the chamber, which would imperil Trump's agenda for the remainder of his term and open the way for congressional investigations into his administration. Republicans hold 220 seats and the Democrats hold 213.

The US gained 64,000 jobs in November but lost 105,000 in October; unemployment rate at 4.6%

By PAUL WISEMAN AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The United States gained a decent 64,000 jobs in November but lost 105,000 in October as federal workers departed after cutbacks by the Trump administration, the government said in delayed reports.

The unemployment rate rose to 4.6% last month, highest since 2021.

The November job gains were higher than the 40,000 economists had forecast. The October job losses were caused by a 162,000 drop in federal workers, many of whom resigned at the end of fiscal year 2025 on Sept. 30 under pressure from billionaire Elon Musk's purge of U.S. government payrolls.

Labor Department revisions also knocked 33,000 jobs off August and September payrolls.

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Hiring has clearly lost momentum, hobbled by uncertainty over President Donald Trump's tariffs and the lingering effects of the high interest rates the Fed engineered in 2022 and 2023 to rein in an outburst of inflation. Since March, job creation has fallen to an average 35,000 a month, compared to 71,000 in the year ended in March.

Both the October and November job creation numbers, released Tuesday by the Labor Department, came in late because of the 43-day federal government shutdown. Those delays have made deliberations more difficult at the Federal Reserve, where policymakers are divided over whether the labor market needs more help from lower interest rates.

Worries about the job market were enough to nudge the Fed into cutting its benchmark interest rate by a quarter of a percentage point last week for the third time this year. But three Fed officials refused to go along with the move, the most dissents in six years. Two voted to keep the rate unchanged while inflation remains above the central bank's 2% target. Stephen Miran, appointed by Trump to the Fed's governing board in September, voted for a bigger cut – in line with what the president demands.

Tuesday's report shows that "the labor market remains weak, but the pace of deterioration probably is too slow to spur the (Fed) to ease again in January," Samuel Tombs, chief U.S. economist at Pantheon Macroeconomics, wrote in a commentary. The Fed holds its next policy meeting Jan. 27-28.

The unemployment rate, though still modest by historical standards, has risen since bottoming out at a 54-year low of 3.4% in April 2023. It rose from 4.4% in September, and the number of people in the labor force – those working or looking for work – increased 323,000 from September. A rate for October was not available because of the shutdown.

Kevin Hassett, director of the White House National Economic Council, said that those pickups likely reflect former federal workers searching for new jobs. "Probably what's going on is the 250,000 federal government workers who took the buyout are staying in the labor force and looking for work" and are therefore counted as unemployed until they find new jobs, Hassett told reporters.

The latest jobs figures could decline in the coming months. Last week, Fed Chair Jerome Powell said that the central bank thinks that hiring has been overcounted by about 60,000 jobs a month since spring. "You can say that the labor market has continued to cool gradually, maybe just a touch more gradually than we thought," Powell said at a news conference.

Workers' average hourly earnings rose just 0.1% from October, the smallest gain since August 2023. Compared to a year earlier, pay was up 3.5%, the lowest since May 2021.

Health care employers added more than 46,000 jobs in November, accounting for more than two-thirds of the 69,000 private sector jobs created last month. Construction companies added 28,000 jobs. Manufacturing shed jobs for the seventh straight month, losing 5,000 jobs in November.

"The takeaway is that the labor market remains on a relatively soft footing, with employers showing little appetite to hire, but are also reluctant to fire," Thomas Feltmate, senior economist at TD Economics, wrote in a commentary. "That said, labor demand has cooled more than supply in recent months, which is what's behind the steady upward drift in the unemployment rate."

Adding to the uncertainty is the growing use of artificial intelligence and other technologies that can reduce demand for workers.

"We're in Lehigh Valley, which is a big transportation hub in eastern Pennsylvania," said Matt Hobbie, vice president of the staffing firm HealthSkill in Allentown. "We've seen some cooling in the logistics and transportation markets, specifically because we've seen automation in those sectors, robotics."

Because of the government shutdown, many agencies are playing catch-up with economic data.

The Labor Department finally put out the September jobs report on Nov. 20, seven weeks late. It published some of the October data – including a count of the jobs created that month by businesses, nonprofits and government agencies – along with the November report Tuesday.

American companies are mostly holding onto the employees they have. But they're reluctant to hire new ones as they struggle to assess how to use artificial intelligence and how to adjust to Trump's unpredictable policies, especially his double-digit taxes on imports from around the world.

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The uncertainty leaves jobseekers struggling to find work.

In May, Amy Beckrich, 54, of Farmington, Minnesota, lost her human relations job at a consulting firm. She's since applied for more than 100 positions. Even landing interviews is difficult. She finally got one, waited 20 minutes – and the recruiter never showed up

Her unemployment benefits ran out this month. "It's tough going into the holidays without any prospects or income," she said. Her husband is still employed, but they've had to cut back. They've put off replacing their car and rarely go out to eat anymore.

"I feel like the hiring system is broken," she said. "The human factor has completely disappeared."

Britain's BBC is both beloved and maligned. Now it faces a \$10 billion Trump lawsuit

By JILL LAWLESS and DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — U.S. President Donald Trump is suing the BBC for \$10 billion over a television documentary he claims was "false, defamatory, deceptive, disparaging, inflammatory and malicious."

Britain's national broadcaster has apologized to Trump over the way it edited a speech in the program, but says it will defend itself against the defamation claim.

The BBC is not the first media organization on the receiving end of a lawsuit from the president. But its position is complicated by its status as a taxpayer-funded public broadcaster and its stature as a closely scrutinized national institution.

A pioneering broadcaster

The BBC was founded in 1922 as a radio service to "inform, educate and entertain," a mantra still central to its self-image.

It launched the world's first regularly scheduled television service in 1936, and helped make TV a mass medium when many Britons bought a TV set specifically to watch the 1953 coronation of Queen Elizabeth II.

It operates 15 U.K. national and regional TV channels, several international channels, 10 national radio stations, dozens of local radio stations, the globe-spanning World Service radio and copious digital output including the iPlayer streaming service.

As well as its news output it has a huge global viewership for entertainment shows including "Doctor Who," "EastEnders," "The Traitors" and "Strictly Come Dancing."

The BBC is funded from the public purse

The broadcaster is funded by an annual license fee, currently set at 174.50 pounds (\$230), paid by all U.K. households who watch live TV or any BBC content.

The license fee has long had opponents, not least rival commercial broadcasters, and they have grown louder in an era of digital streaming when many people no longer have television sets or follow traditional TV schedules.

The BBC's governing charter, which sets the license fee, is reviewed once a decade, and the latest round of the process kicked off Tuesday. The center-left Labour government says it will ensure the BBC has "sustainable and fair" funding but has not ruled out replacing the license fee with another funding model.

Managing the broadcaster has become a political football

The broadcaster is bound by the terms of its charter to be impartial in its output. It is not a state broadcaster beholden to the U.K. government, but is overseen by a board that includes both BBC staff and political appointees.

It's frequently a political football, with conservatives seeing a leftist slant in its news programs and some liberals accusing it of having a conservative bias.

It has repeatedly battled British governments over editorial independence, from the 1926 general strike, when Cabinet minister Winston Churchill tried to seize control of the airwaves, to a battle with Tony Blair's administration over the intelligence used to justify the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

Recently it has been criticized for its coverage of trans issues and the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza. In February, the BBC removed a documentary about Gaza from its streaming service after it emerged that

the child narrator was the son of an official in the Hamas-led government.

Documentary that riled Trump

The lawsuit stems from an edition of the BBC's "Panorama" current affairs series titled "Trump: A Second Chance?" that was broadcast days before the 2024 U.S. presidential election. The film, made by a third-party production company, spliced together two sections of a speech given by Trump on Jan. 6, 2021, into what appeared to be one quote in which Trump urged supporters to march with him and "fight like hell."

By doing so, it made it look like Trump was giving the green light to his supporters to storm the U.S. Capitol as Congress was poised to certify President-elect Joe Biden's victory in the 2020 election that Trump falsely alleged was stolen from him.

The BBC apologized last month and two of its top executives resigned.

Trump's lawyers say the program falsely portrayed the president as a "violent insurrectionist," caused "massive economic damage to his brand value" and was a "brazen attempt" to interfere in the U.S. election.

The lawsuit, filed in a Florida court, seeks \$5 billion in damages for defamation and \$5 billion for unfair trade practices.

Legal jeopardy

The BBC said in a statement that "we will be defending this case. We are not going to make further comment on ongoing legal proceedings."

Media attorney Mark Stephens said Trump and his lawyers face several hurdles. They must prove that the BBC program was shown in Florida and that people in that state thought less of him as a consequence. Trump's lawyers argue that U.S. subscribers to BritBox and people using virtual private networks could have watched it, but they must prove it definitively, said Stephens, a consultant at the firm Howard Kennedy.

"Allegations of libel are cheap, but proof is dear," Stephens said.

Stephens said Trump's lawyers also have to deal with the fact that public figures have "to put up with the slings and arrows of incorrect reporting," which are protected under the First Amendment.

While many legal experts have dismissed the president's claims against the media as having little merit, he has won some lucrative settlements against U.S. media companies and he could try to leverage the BBC mistake for a payout, potentially to a charity of his choice.

The BBC's position is complicated by the fact that any money it pays out in legal fees or a settlement comes from British taxpayers' pocket.

"I think President Trump is banking on the fact that the British public will not want to spend the money to defend the claim, nor will they want to pay any money in damages to him," Stephens said. "So it allows him to continue a narrative of fake news and all of those other things at fairly little cost in the global scheme of things."

How a Trump Media deal with a crypto firm exposes potential conflicts of interest

By BRIAN SLODYSKO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Crypto.com was under siege.

For more than a year, the firm had been investigated by President Joe Biden's Democratic administration, part of an aggressive push to regulate the largely unregulated cryptocurrency industry. Financial regulators had told the company that enforcement action was likely.

Then Donald Trump won the 2024 election, and the company's legal peril dissipated.

Crypto.com ramped up spending to a lobbyist close to Trump and donated \$11 million to political committees tied to the Republican president, records show. Within months, the investigation was dropped. By August, Crypto.com announced it was plunging roughly \$1 billion worth of assets into a venture with a new partner — Trump's social media company.

Legal and ethics experts say Crypto.com's journey from investigative target to Trump business partner provides a case study of the conflicts of interest that have arisen in Trump's second presidency. Unlike any of his predecessors in the modern era, Trump has allowed his family businesses to enter lucrative

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arrangements with companies regulated by the federal government, some of which have benefited from action taken by his administration.

In this instance, the deal struck with Crypto.com was favorable for the president's social media company, which has lost hundreds of millions of dollars since its 2021 launch. Trump Media and Technology Group put up little cash yet received a substantial ownership stake in the new treasury for Crypto.com's Cronos token.

Presidents have historically gone to great lengths to "avoid even the appearance that they are using the office for personal profit," said Kedric Payne, who was formerly a top attorney for the Office of Congressional Ethics.

"It seems like another example of the pay-to-play administration," said Payne, who leads the ethics program at the nonpartisan Campaign Legal Center in Washington. "There is clearly a perception that in order to get favorable policies and acts from the administration, a company needs to provide a financial benefit to the president."

In a statement, Crypto.com spokeswoman Victoria Davis did not address concerns raised by legal and ethics experts.

"Crypto.com looks to partner with companies that are pro crypto and share our vision for its future," said Davis, who called Trump Media "a pioneer in digital media."

Trump Media did not respond to specific questions about the arrangement. In a brief statement, a company spokeswoman, Shannon Devine, called this story "obviously spoon-fed" to The Associated Press "by political operatives."

The White House has repeatedly said that Trump has taken the proper steps to avoid conflicts of interest, pointing to his decision shortly after the presidential election to put his business holdings in a trust controlled by his sons.

"Neither the President nor his family have ever engaged, or will ever engage, in conflicts of interest," White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said in a statement.

Trump Media gets into crypto

Trump Media and Technology Group, which is majority owned by Trump, was not established with cryptocurrency in mind. Its flagship Truth Social platform launched in early 2022, giving the then-former president a megaphone after Twitter and Facebook banned him for his role in fomenting the Jan. 6, 2021, attack by a mob of his supporters on the U.S. Capitol. Trump has been reinstated on both platforms.

Truth Social faced hurdles in getting started. A shell company — a SPAC in financial jargon — that raised money for the venture was investigated by the Securities and Exchange Commission for misleading investors, culminating in a multimillion-dollar penalty. A SPAC board member was sentenced to prison for insider trading.

When it went public in 2024, Trump Media was forced to fend off litigation from two co-founders who accused the company of cheating them out of shares.

Trump Media has yet to turn a profit. Just last year, it lost more than \$400 million. Its stock price closed on Monday at around \$10.50 a share, down from a high of about \$62 when it started trading in March of last year. Over the last year, company executives have branched into new lines of business, including a streaming platform, financial services — and crypto.

The move into crypto was reflective of a complete evolution in Trump's thinking about digital currencies. Not long after leaving office in 2021, he said Bitcoin, a leading cryptocurrency, "seems like a scam." Three years later, during his presidential campaign, he held a very different view. His family launched its own crypto company, World Liberty Financial, started selling tokens and pledged to roll back regulation of the industry.

Among those who have had business entanglements: Changpeng Zhao, the billionaire founder of Binance, who was pardoned by Trump several months after taking part in a complex deal with a sovereign wealth fund for the United Arab Emirates. As a part of arrangement, \$2 billion was invested in World Liberty Financial to buy its new crypto stablecoin.

In a statement, Binance said it was "erroneous and grossly misleading" to describe the company's business

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engagements with World Liberty Financial as a "conflict of interest." The company added that the decision to use World Liberty's stablecoin to consummate the deal was made by the UAE's sovereign wealth fund.

The SEC also paused an investigation of Justin Sun after the crypto tycoon said he bought roughly \$200 million of Trump crypto offerings.

Sun did not respond to requests for comment made through his company.

SEC Investigation

Crypto.com spent much of 2023 and 2024 battling potential regulatory action by the Biden administration. After Trump defeated Biden, the crypto firm began doling out donations to the political committees affiliated with the president-elect.

Crypto.com gave \$1 million to Trump's inauguration last December, followed by a \$10 million contribution in February to MAGA Inc., the president's super PAC. In late 2024, Crypto.com began ramping up lobbying spending to Jeff Miller, a Trump world powerbroker and GOP fundraiser who served as a finance chair of the incoming president's inaugural festivities.

Miller, who did not respond to a request for comment, lobbied the White House and the SEC on regulatory matters, according to disclosure reports. The investigation was formally dismissed on March 27.

A spokeswoman for Crypto.com said Miller "had no involvement" with the SEC investigation. The company declined to comment on the nature or severity of the charges the SEC intended to pursue against it.

Agency commissioners during Biden's presidency authorized bringing charges against Crypto.com. But attorneys for the company negotiated with the SEC to delay the filing of any enforcement action until after Trump took the presidency. In exchange, Crypto.com withdrew a countersuit filed against the SEC. Such negotiations are common before the SEC brings an enforcement case.

"Ultimately, the investigation was closed because there was no legitimate case to pursue," said Davis, the spokeswoman. "There is absolutely no connection between that decision and Crypto.com's" political activities.

"Any assertion to the contrary is entirely inaccurate," she added.

Days before Crypto.com disclosed that the SEC's investigation had been dropped, Trump Media was making news of its own.

Hunting for new partners

When it launched a series of investment funds in March with a "Made in America focus," Trump Media announced that Crypto.com was tapped to be the funds' digital host.

Trump Media was eyeing even more deals, though, and the early foray between the two companies offered a glimmer of what was to come.

In April, officials for the social media company signaled that they were hunting for a telecom, media or technology company to acquire. They joined forces with a financial services firm and launched a SPAC to raise the money for the venture.

Four months later, Trump Media and Crypto.com announced the formation of Trump Media Group CRO Strategy. They said the new company would serve as a treasury for Crypto.com's Cronos token, though company officials have not revealed many specifics.

Under the terms of the deal, which has not yet been finalized, Crypto.com is obligated to contribute the lion's share of capital, plunging what was then valued at \$1 billion worth of its Cronos token into the venture. Yorkville Advisors, a financial services firm that has worked closely with Trump Media, is providing a line of credit. Trump Media's contribution is more limited and includes "a license to use certain intellectual property," according to an SEC filing.

All three companies will have "majority ownership" in the new venture, according to a company press release. But how much of a stake Trump Media will hold has not yet been disclosed.

"When you consider the investigation into (Crypto.com) was dropped, the economics of this look more like a plea deal than a business deal," said Corey Frayer, a cryptocurrency policy expert who was a senior official at the SEC during Biden's presidency.

Hilary Allen, a law professor at American University who specializes in banking and cryptocurrency, said the deal was troubling from an ethical perspective.

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With Crypto.com, "we have an investigation being dropped and an investment (in a Trump company) after the fact," Allen said. "People can draw their own conclusions."

Trump Media Chairman and CEO Devin Nunes told a conservative commentator in August that the new company offered consumers "two names" — Trump Media and Crypto.com — "you can trust."

"This is really going to become the future of finance," said Nunes, a former congressional Republican and close Trump ally.

Crypto.com appears eager to cement other deals with Trump Media. The crypto exchange announced in October that it was creating an online marketplace that will allow Truth Social users to wager on an array of world events.

Among those that users will be able to bet on: the outcome of elections.

Today in History: December 17, the Wright Brothers' first flight

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Wednesday, Dec. 17, the 351st day of 2025. There are 14 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Dec. 17, 1903, Wilbur and Orville Wright conducted the first successful manned, powered airplane flights near Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, using their experimental craft, the Wright Flyer.

Also on this date:

In 1777, France becomes one of the first nations to officially recognize the independence of the United States.

In 1933, the Chicago Bears defeated the New York Giants 23-21 in the first NFL championship game.

In 1944, U.S. Army Maj. Gen. Henry C. Pratt rescinded incarceration orders for people of Japanese ancestry during World War II; more than 110,000 people, about two-thirds of them U.S. citizens, had been forced into camps after a February 1942 executive order by President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

In 1963, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Clean Air Act into law; it was the first federal legislation targeting the control of air pollution.

In 1975, Lynette "Squeaky" Fromme was sentenced to life in prison for her attempt on the life of President Gerald R. Ford in Sacramento, California. (She was paroled in August 2009.)

In 1979, Arthur McDuffie, a Black insurance broker and former Marine, was beaten by police after leading them on a chase with his motorcycle in Miami. McDuffie died four days later. (Four white police officers accused of beating McDuffie were acquitted in 2000, sparking riots in Miami that led to several deaths and millions of dollars in damages.)

In 1989, "The Simpsons" debuts on Fox television; it has become the longest-running animated U.S. TV series.

In 1992, President George H.W. Bush, Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney and Mexican President Carlos Salinas de Gortari signed the North American Free Trade Agreement in separate ceremonies; NAFTA went into effect in 2004 and was replaced by the United States–Mexico–Canada Agreement in 2020.

In 2014, the United States and Cuba announced they would restore diplomatic relations, which had been severed in 1961 after Fidel Castro's 1959 revolution overthrew a U.S.-backed government. Full diplomatic relations resumed in 2015.

In 2024, Lt. Gen. Igor Kirillov, a senior Russian general, was killed by a bomb hidden in a scooter outside his apartment building in Moscow, a day after Ukraine's security service accused him of directing the use of banned chemical weapons in Russia's war in Ukraine. A Ukrainian official said the service carried out the attack in which Kirillov's assistant also died.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Armin Mueller-Stahl is 95. Actor Ernie Hudson is 80. Political commentator Chris Matthews is 80. Comedian-actor Eugene Levy is 79. Actor Wes Studi is 78. Rock singer Paul Rodgers is 76. Actor Bill Pullman is 72. Filmmaker Peter Farrelly is 69. Rock musician Mike Mills (R.E.M.) is 67. Country singer Tracy Byrd is 59. Actor Laurie Holden is 56. Actor Claire Forlani is 54. Filmmaker Rian Johnson is 52. Actor Sarah Paulson is 51. Actor Giovanni Ribisi is 51. Actor Milla Jovovich (YO'-vuh-vich) is 50. Boxer Manny Pacquiao is 47. Actor Emma Bell is 39. Actor-singer Nat Wolff is 31.